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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AN INDIAN RE-READING

Edited by
Augustine Mulloor

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A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

The Acts of the Apostles an Indian Re-reading

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CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Editorial | 99 |
| Ascension (Acts 1:1-11): A Challenge of the Indian Church to Start Afresh <i>Augustine Mulloor</i> | 101 |
| Jerusalem Pentecost: An Indian Reinterpretation and Challenges <i>Philip Chempakassery</i> | 108 |
| Acts 2:17-21: A Paradigm for a Collaborative Mission <i>Prema</i> | 122 |
| The Growth of the Community Through Struggles (Acts 2:42-4:37): Challenges of the Church in India <i>Mathew Thekkakara</i> <i>Thomas Punnappadam</i> | 137 |
| Paul's Experience of the Risen Lord: Reflections on Mission, Persecution and Religio-Cultural Loyalty <i>Paddy M. Meagher</i> | 146 |
| The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35) - An Indian Re-reading <i>Paul Kariamadam</i> | 162 |
| The Work of the Holy Spirit: The Universalistic Approach in Acts 6-12 <i>Jose Vadakkedom</i> | 174 |

Editorial

The Indian Church, nobody would deny, is one of the most powerful churches in the world. But the word "powerful" can mean many things. From the perspective of infra-structure, organization, man-power, the church in India is fantastically "powerful". However, the fruits emerging from this traditional church is disproportionate and scanty. We need to "let go of a colonial christianity that was linked up with the seats of political power" and "to search for a christianity that is rooted in the midst of the struggle of the poor and the fight to bring unity amidst communal divisive forces, justice in the face of slavery and discrimination, peace in the midst of warring feuds, joy and love in a world torn by terrorism, dissatisfaction and deceit to be steeped in the spirituality of ancient cultures their rythms and delicate customs of great beauty and meaning" (E. Lentzen-Deis (Ed.), *Images of Jesus*, Bombay, 1989, 11).

The Indian church has to come out of fear, out of the security of the chartered waters and meticulously preplanned ways, out of the stagnant and inert life by going back to the original models of the gospels and first christian communities. Luke by composing a second volume was articulating the dynamism of the church in the process of growth. The purpose of Luke is both ecclesiological and eschatological. Luke appears to be raising with some urgency such questions as: Who are the christians? Where do they come from historically and culturally... What is their historical situation in relation to God's whole dealings with the world? (R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, Edinburgh, 1982, 1-2).

What is presented in this issue of *Jeevadhara* is the result of such a concern that the present-day church should stir itself from the state of security and power and go back, in spirit, to the original models as

depicted in the Acts of the Apostles: that is, by a re-reading of the Acts.

Thus Augustine Mulloor takes up the 'Ascension' narrative as a point of departure for a new mission of the Indian church. According to the re-reading of the Jerusalem Pentecost by Philip Chempakassery, the Indian Church is challenged to be charismatic after the model of that original Pentecost. The emerging mission of the church is verbalized by Prema on the basis of Acts 2: 17-21 in which Joel is cited and is the paradigm of a collaborative prophetic mission. Mathew Thekkakara and Thomas Punnapadam study the struggles involved in the growth of the church according to Acts 2: 42-4, 37 to identify the challenges of the Indian Church. Paddy Meagher takes the experience of the risen Jesus of Saul as the point of departure for his reflections on mission, persecution and religio-cultural loyalty in the Indian context. According to Paul Kariamadam Jerusalem Council is a model of reinterpreting the situation of the Indian Church. Jose Vadakkedom studies the universalistic perspective of Acts 6-12 in order to show such an attitude to be deepened by the present-day church.

This is not, however a point of arrival, but a point of departure for a long journey of the Indian church re-reading the Bible.

Jyotir Bhavan.
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Augustine Mulloor

Ascension (Acts 1:1-11): A Challenge of the Indian Church to Start Afresh

Augustine Mulloor

Ascension is the event that concludes the Gospel narration as well as the event that opens the Acts of the Apostles. For Acts, it is an overture to the narration of the birth and growth of the church, a push to start the onward movement of the community of believers with a clear heavenly orientation and a mission that is universal and earthly. It contains what is necessary for the Indian church to restart its mission. Dr. Augustine Molloor OCD, the editor of the issue and the author of this article is President of Jyotir Bhavan, the Institute of Theology and Spirituality, Kalamassery, Kerala.

I. The Indian Church and its need to start life afresh

Perhaps it sounds rather odd to speak of starting afresh than of a more powerful going forward because starting afresh requires looking back and returning to our origins which may awaken unpleasant old memories nay, ever demand the acceptance of the fact that we have deviated from our origins. Our history has been written from the point of view of the powerful, central stream and the church has accepted her position within this central stream but has failed to project herself as coming out of the Pentecost. She behaves as though she made herself. Instead of becoming the medium for rewriting our history from the point of view of the majority poor and declaring herself as the church of the poor, she has identified herself with the powerful minority and considered the option for the poor as an extension to her main mission, as rather subsidiary and optional. Can she declare herself to be unequivocally “the church of the poor”?

The Indian society of today is terribly affected and influenced by the pleasure-oriented and profit-centred culture and it seems to have

uncritically yielded to this very tempting materialistic vision, consumeristic attitude, profit motivated actions and unwarranted greed for worldliness¹. Instead of learning from the fate of the West and America India seems to blindly follow their ways and hence it is not difficult to predict that subsequently it will face a crisis from which it can hardly escape. The church being the sacrament of God in the world has the responsibility and mission to initiate a counter culture. If the church herself is led by the spirit of the same culture, how can it become the paradigm of and catalyst for a change of the culture itself? Is it really ready and prepared to continue the history of salvation from its "Mitte der Zeit" to "Zeit des Geistes"²?

II. Ascension: Introduction to Acts of the Apostles

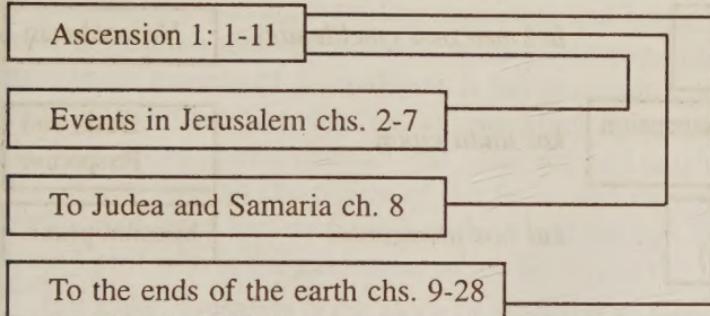
Luke begins his second volume narrating the event of Ascension as he concluded the first volume with the same. Hence Ascension serves as a link between the two volumes. However, in the second volume the narration of ascension has a special function. It is the overture to the book and an introduction to its main thematic development. So the rest of the narration in the book is a systematic development of what is stated here.

1:8 is the title for the whole *Acts of the Apostles*³. It articulates the source of the power of the church and the global dimensions of its mission: the Spirit of God and the evangelization from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The Spirit will empower the disciples and they will become the witnesses to Jesus in the whole universe starting from Jerusalem.

The narration that follows begins with the Pentecost by which the apostles are empowered and transformed and then the progress of evangelization is articulated. The end of the *Acts* shows how the evangelization is going on in Rome through the ministry of Paul who is

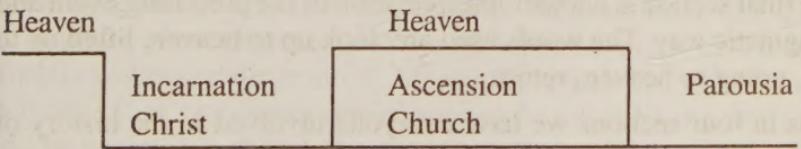
1. cfr. ITA, *A future vision for an Indian*, Jarsuguda, 1995; ITA, *Hope at the dawn of 21st Century*, Pune, 1999; John Desrochers, *Towards a new India*, Bangalore, 1995; S. Ambirajam, *Good people, bad times*, Chennai, 1995; *Gaudium et Spes* (Document of Second Vat. Council)
2. cfr. H. Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit*, Tübingen, 1994⁷.
3. cfr. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford, 1985, 143-147.

under house arrest, a symbolic way of saying that the Gospel has reached the whole world.



III. The syntactic status of the text

Beginning with a *narrative* style it moves to a *dialogue* before the event of *Ascension* is narrated and finally there is a *parenetic* part. There is a vision and there are interpretations of the same before and after that. The preceding interpretation is based on the words of Jesus, whereas the following interpretation is based on the words of two messengers clothed in white. In both there is a reinterpretation of the parousia and the clarification of the mission of the apostles or of the church. There are descriptions of the various moments and stages of God's self-revelatory process through Jesus Christ in this narration: Incarnation, Ascension, Parousia: the movements from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven and again from heaven to earth.



In this process the position of the church can be identified as parallel to that of Jesus which is the strong theological position of Luke in the Acts.

The movement from narration to dialogue and from there to the narration of the event of ascension and to parenthesis is indicated through literary expressions namely, *to men proton logon, hoi men oun synelthontes, kai tauta eipon, and kai hos atenizontes*.

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Narration (Vv. 1-5) | <i>to men proton logon</i> | Circumstance Tradition |
| 2. | Dialogue (Vv. 6-8) | <i>hoi men oun synelthontes</i> | Vision/dream |
| 3. | Event – Ascension (V. 9) | <i>kai tauta eipon</i> | Basis and Perspective |
| 4. | Parenesis (Vv. 10-11) | <i>kai hos atenizontes</i> | Mission/praxis |

Verses 1-5 which form the first section of our text is a technical and systematic introduction to the work parallel to 1: 1-4 of the Gospel. The identity of the writer and the addressee, the situation after the resurrection and the new situation that is going to come are brought to focus. It is a synthesis, of the central moment of salvation history, namely the time of Jesus: his life and ministry on earth, death and resurrection and the function of the Spirit.

The shift to the next section is indicated: "Then, when they were together...". As mentioned earlier this is an interpretation of the event that follows. The words are: kingdom, to be reestablished, Father, to decide, appointed time, time to know, Holy Spirit, power, witness, ends of the earth.

The ascension itself is narrated in one sentence. The vocabulary is notable: lifted up, clouds, beyond sight.

The final section is another interpretation of the preceding event and in a pragmatic way. The words used are: look up to heaven, lifted up to heaven, going to heaven, return.

Thus in four sections we have everyone involved in the history of salvation and every theme that is crucial in the same: Father, Jesus, Spirit, Kingdom of God, church, witness, ends of the earth (universe). From here let us pass on to the semantic analysis of the text.

IV. Semantic analysis

1. Circumstance and tradition (1: 1-5)

Luke is taking a daring step to go beyond the Gospel to write another volume that will continue the tradition of the gospel⁴. Although Mt has

4. Ibid. pp 144f.

the ecclesiological vision penetrating all the traditions of the ministry of Jesus, that is integrated into the literary form of the Gospel⁵. Whereas here Luke is departing from the traditional and hence he has to show how the church that opens itself beyond Palestine clings at the same time to the essence of the tradition. It has to remain true to itself while becoming compatible to the “world” into which it ventures itself⁶. Hence the first verses summarises all that Jesus did and taught. The apostles are chosen through the power of the Spirit and they will receive the tradition of Jesus and continue it in the world through the power of the same Spirit who is the guaranteee of the fidelity to the Jesus’ tradition.

For Luke Jerusalem is the place of salvation as Jesus suffered, died and was risen there. The beginning of the mission must be in Jerusalem unlike in the Markan-Matthean tradition of the beginning of the mission by Jesus and the apostles at Galilee. But here the emphasis is in the empowerment by the Spirit, which is a foreshadowing of the Pentecost. What the apostles have to undertake is not a “work” that can be accomplished with the help of human power but a “mission” that emerges from a “vocation” which can be fulfilled only if they waited inside the city until the power of God came upon them. The vertical dimension and the charismatic nature of the church in the process of emergence are crystallized here. Without being “in the city of Jerusalem” they cannot make a leap to the “world”, to be baptized by the Spirit.

2. Vision and dream (1: 6-8)

The dialogue between Jesus and the disciples synthesizes the vision and the dream to be lived by the church as it launches itself. The concept of the kingdom of God is at the centre of the discussion. The question of disciples gives expression to the misrepresentations of the same in worldly and materialistic terms. Moreover, in their vision it is restricted to Israel. Thus two major orientations to be taken by the church, as it will be depicted in the whole of Acts of the Apostles are brought here for discussion and clarification. Surely, the discussion involves also the question of parousia and its delay. So the answer of Jesus is the articulation

5. Matthean theological vision is identified as ecclesiological starting with G. Bornkamm’s article on stilling of the storm. Thereafter it has been developed in details by various authors like Trilling, Walker, Meier, Kingsbury etc. Mt has presented this theological vision within the narration of the ministry of Jesus.
6. E. Haenchen, *The Acts* 141-142.

of the basic vision the church has to keep as it journeys into the world looking forward to the end of days when Jesus will return.

Luke uses Mk 13: 32 where Jesus speaks about the hour not known to the Son but only to the Father (parallel Mt 24: 36) here to clarify the meaning of “time” of the establishment of the kingdom in its fulness. The church has a mission until that day which is not known to anybody except to God, the Lord of history. This mission is articulated in verse 8 together with its source, namely the empowerment in the Spirit. The universality of the mission is the focus here.

3. Basis and Perspective (1:9)

This is the second narration of ascension as mentioned earlier. There are no basic dissimilarities between both. In both the ascension happens after the instructions given to the disciples. It happens outside Jerusalem, according to both. It is the action of God, the Father. Both speak of the need to wait for the Spirit to come.

Avoiding all the elements of an impressive and fascinating description of the ascension, Luke gives only a dry skeleton of the description of the event. No emotional and sentimental elements are included⁷. The reason is that this event is supposed to serve as the basis and the perspective of the church for its mission. Hence the disciples here represent the nucleus of the church. Jesus’ going to the Father is the guarantee for the mission of the church. Until Jesus returns the church takes his place in the world.

4. Parenthesis (1:10-11)

The pragmatic impulse is given through the two messengers who challenge the disciples to leave inactivity and enter into the fulfillment of the mission. It is a dynamism that emerges from the deep consciousness of the heaven-oriented vision. The presence of the word “heaven” twice and the implication of the same once in the expression “going up” is intended to speak out that the church has to keep this dimension ever clear before her.

V. Praxis-model for the Reader

From the synthetic – semantic analysis it is clear that the author has a practical purpose in mind as he narrates the Ascension. He wants to help his readers identify the pragmatic target of his book, namely, to

7. Ibid. pp. 150-152.

understand the Church as the dynamic continuation of the person of Jesus and his living tradition. All the elements of the text in four steps help the reader recapture in mind, already before entering into the book, which the essential elements of that relationship between Jesus and the Church are. The principles of fidelity and relevance are fundamental. The assurance for both comes from the Spirit. Hence being charismatic and at the same time rooted in tradition is an essential demand. To go beyond the definitions and frameworks of the immanent Parousia, trusting in the sovereignty of God the Father, guaranteed by the presence of Jesus through ascension which is God's action like resurrection and keeping the heaven - oriented vision and engaging in a mission with commitment for an all-inclusive and universal community through evangelization is the task of the Church.

VI. Challenges to Indian Church

The Acts of the Apostles is an action model and every church is called upon to take up the challenge of starting afresh from the ascension and pentecost, keeping the proper values as envisaged by the first church.

The Indian church has to return faithfully to the spirit of its origins. Only then it can continue faithfully the witnessing mission of the apostles. It has to remember actively its charismatic origins as the apostles were called by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. While being faithful to the charismatic origins, it has to venture into the whole world. So it has to break the traditional and safe chartered paths. It has to recognize the universality of her mission. This will include not only the geographical universality but also the capacity to take into consideration the marginalized poor who forms the majority. So that the empowerment by the Spirit and the active universal mission may be harmoniously blended, there is need for the Indian church to learn to be inside the city, waiting for the Spirit to descend, and to make really risky decisions to transcend the frontiers to realize the "Zeit des Geistes". It is indeed very relevant for the Indian church to keep the heavenly orientation so as to counteract worldly and earthly values, being so uncritically influential today. If the mission of the church is to get involved in everything, during this period of time before Jesus returns at the end time, the Indian church has a long way to go, and to suffer for the sake of the Kingdom of God, daring to move from stagnancy to dynamism, from narrow vision to an inclusive universal vision demanding the understanding of herself as the church of the poor and for the poor.

Jerusalem Pentecost: An Indian Reinterpretation and Challenges

Philip Chempakassery

The story of the Jerusalem Pentecost, besides being the fulfilment of the promise of the Risen Christ, is an enduring experience of universality in the Church and the World. God is the Lord of all humans. The first Pentecost at Jerusalem prepares the way for the second Pentecost in the context of Cornelius's conversion. Dr. Philip Chempakassery, the contributor of this article, is Professor of New Testament at St. Mary's Malankara Major Seminary, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Jerusalem Pentecost is the first powerful experience of the Holy Spirit as fulfillment of the promise of the Risen Christ. Already in the Gospel, Luke had reported the promise of the Risen Lord: "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father Promised: so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high"(Luke 24: 49). In the second volume of his work, Luke reports the fulfillment of this promise as happened on the day of Pentecost. This episode which is given in Acts 2:1-47 is one of the most difficult passages in the whole NT. The difficulty is noticeable not on the linguistic ground, nor on the theological meaning intended by the author, but in deciding what exactly happened. It is doubtless that the story of the Pentecost is a symbol for teaching theological lessons. But what is the source of the symbol? Is it totally a literary creation of the author or does it point to some source, which the author used to narrate the story? Even if we are to establish that Luke depends on sources independent of and prior to him, the historical value of the form of the story still remains unanswered. The answers given by scholars to the above and similar questions do not agree among themselves¹. Therefore it seems that the better course of

1. Cf. Conzelmann.H, *Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987, pp 15-17.

action for a modern student of the book of Acts would be to leave out the question altogether and concentrate on the theological meaning of the episode.

1. Certain linguistic peculiarities

The Jerusalem Pentecost narrative is one of the best-written portions of the book of Acts. The author has given extreme care in selecting words and phrases so much so that it seems that he wants to convey some very important ideas through the choice of words and phrases and through their calculated repetition. A look into these linguistic peculiarities will bring out some of the theological intentions of the author.

1.1. The technique of Inclusion

The author makes use of the technique of inclusion to mark off the Pentecost episode from other parts of the books. This is done by the use of the word *homothumadon* at 2:1 and 2:46. This compound word coming from *homou* and *thumos* means ‘with one mind’. This is a favorite expression of the author to bring out the nature of the Church. It seems that Luke understands the Church as an assembly of people of one mind. It is used a total of 11 times in Acts. But in the first volume of his work the word is never used. In chapter 2 of the Acts, it occurs at verses 1 and 46 marking the chapter off from other parts showing that 2:1-46 is one unit to be considered together.

1.2. Terms of universality

Luke uses many other terms, which bring out the idea of wholeness or universality. The word *pas* (all) occurs altogether 13 times in this one chapter alone: (2:5,7(bis), 12,17,21,25,32,36,39,43,44,45). A stronger word to express wholeness or entirety, *apas* occurs four times (2:1,4,145,44). Another word *holos* occurs twice (2:2.47). The idea of universality is expressed also by the use of certain phrases like *heis hekastos autos* (each one-2: 4), *hos an* (whoever- 2:40), *heis hekastos* (each one-2:6), *hemeis hekastos* (each one of us- 2:8) and *hekastos humon* (each one of you- 2:38). There are other words with similar meaning though they do not convey directly the idea of universality. For example, *menestomenoi* at 2:13 means ‘full’ and it also points to the idea of entirety.

1.3. Idea of Communion

As the passage is full of the idea of wholeness or universality, it also expresses the idea of communion among those involved in the universally

assembled group. 2:42 has the noun *koinonia* (fellowship). 2:42 speaks of the sharing of food among the believers and it is a sure sign of communion. 2:44 speaks about the togetherness of the believers (*epi to auto*). The same verse speaks of the common possession of things (*eikon panta koina*). 2:45 speaks of the distribution of individual possessions of the believers. 2:14 speaks of the communion among the Apostles. Peter stands with the eleven to explain the meaning of the extraordinary event. It shows that the preaching is not his personal function but the function of the college of Apostles. The verb *synerchomai* (come together- 2:6) is another expression for the communion among the individual believers.

1.4. Respect for individual differences

In spite of the fact that the text is dominated by the idea of universalism, it also shows respect for the individual and his/her differences. The individual is not lost in the community; on the contrary his/her individuality is rightly preserved. This is clear from the stress on the language in which the people hear the message of the Apostles. The text says that each one heard the message in his/her own native language. In other words, according to Luke the Pentecostal phenomenon is one that combines in itself the ideals of universality, sharing and individuality. The phenomenon is not understood as a divine intervention to obliterate the differences of people and to give a common message of salvation. Rather God who intervenes through the extraordinary phenomenon respects the differences of the people and their linguistic affiliations to make it possible for all of them not simply to understand the message but to hear it in their own native language.

2. The Structure of the Narrative

The passage may be divided as follows:

1: 1 – 4 the extraordinary event.

1: 5 – 13 the reaction of the people.

A.1:5– 6 introduction to the reaction of the people.

B.1:7–12 the positive reaction of amazement relating the event to the mighty deeds of God.

C.1: 13 the negative reaction.

1:14 – 36 Peter's explanatory speech.

A.1:14 - 15 explaining what the phenomenon is not.

B.1:16 - 21 explaining what the phenomenon is with scripture quotations.

C.1:22 - 24 the background as the death and resurrection of Jesus

D.1:25 - 28 scripture support.

E.1:29 - 33 interpretation of the scripture.

F.1:34 - 35 scripture quotation to support the interpretation.

G.1:36- the conclusion to Peter's sermon.

2: 37 the reaction of the people to the sermon of Peter.

2: 38 - 40 Peter's instruction to the reaction.

2: 41 - 42 the reaction of the people tot the instruction of Peter.

2: 43 - 46 the nature of the people who reacted positively to Peter's instruction.

2: 47 - the conclusion of the whole passage.

3. The Movement of Ideas

As there is clear teaching on universality and communion, there is also a clear movement of ideas in this passage. From 2:1 to 2:15 the text is full of the idea of the Holy Spirit. In this section there is no mention, direct or indirect, of God or of Christ. The wondrous happenings of the day of Pentecost are all the doings of the Spirit. The Apostles speak in the power of the Spirit and the people hear them and understand the message of "God's deeds of power" in their own native language in the power of the Spirit. The explanatory speech of Peter also begins in the power of the Spirit. After this section on exclusive reference to the Spirit is found. In 2:16, God is indirectly introduced: "Now this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel". Though there is no direct use of the term 'God' or its equivalent, the idea is expressed through the use of divine passive. The indirect agent of the passive verb "was spoken" cannot but be God. After the indirect mention of God, there is direct mention all through the passage down to verse 47. The indirect mention of God in verse 16 at the end of the passage exclusively dominated by the activities of the Spirit gives us the impression that though what is immediately experienced is the Spirit what lies behind is God himself. This impression is continued in the verses that follow, where God's

action in sending the Spirit is clearly mentioned. This section (vv 17-20) is intermittently dominated by the mention of God as the underlying principle and the Spirit as the outward expression. This section ends with the mention of the “Lord” in v. 20. This Lord refers clearly to Christ and not to God, because the conclusion to Peter’s speech is that God has made Jesus “both Lord and Messiah” (v 36). From v. 20, the main emphasis is on Christ. But Christ is not presented alone but as the one sent by God, vindicated by him and glorified by him and made equal by setting him at God’s own right hand side. Because of this glorification, Jesus becomes the centre of the faith life of the people and the value to which every one should be committed. Thus there is a clear movement from the Spirit through God to Christ. The wonders of the Spirit are not meaningful except in view of their value to lead to Christ. It is all done by God to manifest Christ’s glory and to make people partakers of this glory by their reception of the Spirit through the Sacrament of baptism. At the end Christ becomes all in all.

There is another movement of ideas. It is the movement from the tumultuous nature of the situation in the beginning to the calmness at the end. The author is very emphatic in depicting this profound transformation. The narrative about the coming of the Spirit ends with the positive comment, “all were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, ‘what does this mean?’ and the negative comment, ‘They are filled with new wine’ (2:12,13). Negative or positive, the situation is one of confusion and bafflement. But at the end of the passage we have a quite different picture. It is a situation of “praising God and having the good-will of all the people” (2:47).

Another movement is a movement of growth. In the beginning “they were all together in one place” (2:1). The “they” should mean the one hundred twenty persons of 1:15. But in 2:41 three thousand new members are added to this group. But the addition does not stop there. It continues on a daily basis making it ever increasing, “and day by day the Lord added to their number of those who were being saved” (2:47).

4. The main thrust of the text

The above linguistic considerations and the movement of ideas bring us to some inevitable conclusions. The main ideas that can be gathered from this analysis may be listed as follows.

God is the one who guides everything that happens in the Church. The election of a new Apostle to replace Judas, the extraordinary

phenomenon on the day of Pentecost, the healing of the lame man by Peter and John etc. are all activities of God done through the hands of the Apostles. 4:19 and 5:29 are especially important in this regard. Peter insists that it is divine necessity that he should speak in the name of Jesus in spite of the civil prohibition².

The Pentecost narrative is clearly saturated with the idea of universalism. But it is not any isolated teaching, but forms the central theme of the two-volume work. It is true that those affected by the Pentecost event and those who seek explanation and those who were spoken to are all Jews. But they are not Jews of Jerusalem but the Diaspora Jews gathered in the city for the feast. Therefore it is not any separatist Jewish ethnic idea that is provided but a really universal idea. But at this point the universalism includes only the Jews in faith. It is because the Jews have, according to the theology of Luke a mediator's role in the realization of the all-embracing universalism, which will abrogate the division of humanity into Jews and non-Jews. In fact the Jerusalem Pentecost is only the first Pentecost that prepares the way for the second Pentecost in the context of the conversion of Cornelius, a pagan (chap 9)³. This is all the more clear from the use of the word "ethnos to indicate the wide range of origins of the hearers"⁴. It is a term, which is technically used for referring to pagans.

When we read the Pentecost narrative in connection with many similar passages in the gospel and the Acts, we cannot fail to note the unity of Luke's theological stress that emphasizes the universality of salvation. Already in the gospel we are told, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God"(3:6) and that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem"(24:47). This universalism is continued in the Acts when the author makes Christ tell his disciples, "...and you shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This universalism is powerfully brought out in the episode of the Pentecost

2. Cf. Squires.J.T, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Pres, 1997, p. 58.
3. Cf. Betori. G, "Luke 24:47: Jerusalem and the Beginning of the Preaching to the Pagan in the Acts of the Apostles" in *Luke and Acts*, (ed) O'Collins. G and Marconi. G. (tr) O'Connel.M, New York, Paulist Press, 1991, pp. 115-117
4. ibid p. 116

and is continued till the end of the second volume where Paul challenges the Jews saying, "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the gentiles; they will listen" (Acts 28:28). But this universality of salvation is not any human doing nor is it dependent mainly on the Apostolic preaching of the disciples. It is rather the will of God, which is the decisive force in all these things. The subordination of universalism to the divine will is clear in the Pentecost episode and the explanatory preaching of Peter who quotes Joel, the Prophet, who said, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" (2:17). Thus it is clear that the universalism "is subordinated to God's salvific will, since this universality itself was due to that will. Nevertheless, so important was this universal dimension of salvation to Luke that he integrated it into his Gospel and the Acts so that it would always, in some sense, be before the eyes of his readers".⁵

But this universalism is such that it respects and promotes individual interests. These may seem mutually exclusive ideas. But Luke takes pains to reconcile these seemingly exclusive concepts. The Apostles and others with them speak in ecstasy a language given to them by the Holy Spirit. It is very clearly said that they "began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (2:4). These languages have no name or any determining characters. The "other languages" only mean some indeterminate utterance. But the important feature of the miraculous phenomenon is not the "other" languages they spoke, but that each one could understand the message in one's own language. It is this aspect of the glossalalia, which is stressed in the narrative⁶. It is a fact that extraordinary utterances are connected with the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Num. 11:26). But those utterances were not accompanied with power on the part of the audience to understand the message in their own language. Therefore it is clear that the universalism of the narrative is very clearly complimented with importance given to individual differences and the particular languages and cultures of the audience.

As we have already pointed out earlier in connection with the movement of ideas, there is a clear stress on faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus

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- 5. O' Toole R.F, *The Unity of Luke's Theology, An Analysis of Luke- Acts*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier Inc, 1984, p. 108
 - 6. cf. Bruce F.F. *The Book of Acts*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1988, p. 52

is presented as the answer to the problems coming up from the corrupt and enslaving world in which the audience find themselves. Jesus is the liberator, the haven to which the people should flee. But in going to Jesus, they form a new society, the Church that is presented as an ever-growing community of the faithful who have escaped from the enslaving power of the corrupt world.

5. The Indian Scenario

The Scriptures are not words of God unrelated to the human situation. They are the personal communication of God to a people in their actual life situation. Therefore text and context are to be taken together. The text makes sense in the context. The word of God has to get incarnate in the life situation of the people for whom it is communicated. The Bible itself is ample proof for this fact. The midrashic interpretation of the history of the world and of Israel by the Chronicler to make it point to the divine covenantal promise to David, shows that Israel's self awareness gained through the word of God had to get incarnate in the particular situation of the people. The NT authors re-interpreted the whole OT, especially the prophetic literature to make it a preparation for the Christ event. The NT is OT in its reinterpretation to make it relevant and supportive to the new faith acquired in the light of the Christ experience. This process has to continue as long as human life continues on this planet of ours and as long as scriptures have to be made meaningful and relevant.

To interpret the text in question, the narrative about the Jerusalem Pentecost, is a meaningful way in the Indian context, we need to be aware of the situation of India. A thorough analysis of the Indian context is beyond the scope of this paper and the competence of this author and therefore such an analysis is not attempted. At the same time, this author believes that the Indian situation can be expressed in certain general terms. The most glaring aspect of the Indian situation which has for centuries haunted the human spirit in India is the situation of dividing humans on the basis of caste which casts a great majority of the population below human dignity. The progress India has made in rising to self-consciousness and dignity by shaking off the filth of caste feelings is great and praise worthy. Yet even today, the Indian society is divided on the basis of caste and at least in villages, the scheduled caste members are discriminated against. This is true in the case of land holdings,

opportunities for dignified employment both in the Government and private sectors, literacy rate and the like. In a research study about the plight of the scheduled Castes Gummadi Nancharaiah gives alarming facts about them. It is a study about the Kanchakoduru village of Krishna district in Andra Predesh. He says, "In the case of transport and other services there is no Scheduled Caste person. This can be attributed to the untouchability which prevents Scheduled Castes from entering into some sectors"⁷. About landed property the author gives a more pitiable picture: "It is observed that the largest proportion of landless households belongs to the Scheduled Castes (63 per cent)"⁸. If 63% of the Indian people, the citizens of India belonging to the Scheduled Caste households, have no land, we are forced by our moral conscience to ask, "then whose property is this land called India?" and "what is meant by citizenship?" *Mutatis mutandis*, we can say that what is true of Kanchakoduru village is true of other villages as well.

Another important area in which attention of the Government is due but not actually available is the agricultural sector. "In the case of many developing countries like India, agriculture accounts for over 40 per cent of the real gross domestic product on which about three fourths of the country's population depends directly or indirectly for its living"⁹. Yet agriculture is not given serious thought by our rulers. Socially and economically those in the agricultural sector experience rejection and discard.

There is also backwardness in education. This situation affects the Scheduled Castes in more ways than one. First of all they are deprived of opportunities in higher and dignified jobs. Secondly they are kept ignorant of their own rights and privileges and this situation exposes them to exploitation by the well-educated upper class citizens. A ruling of the Supreme Court of India given in 1986 is an eye-opener in this regard. The Court said, "It may, therefore, now be taken as settled law that free legal assistance at State cost is a fundamental right of a person accused of an offence which may involve jeopardy to his life or personal liberty... It is common knowledge that 70% of the people living in rural areas are illiterate and even more than that percentage of people are not

7. Nancharaiah. G, *Land and Caste*, Delhi Himalaya Publishing House, 1988,
p. 33
8. ibid. p/ 41. 9. ibid p.1

aware of the rights conferred on them by law... It is this absence of legal awareness which is responsible for the deception, exploitation and deprivation of rights and benefits from which the poor suffer in this land"¹⁰.

6. The Challenging message for India

An Indian Christian cannot read the Jerusalem Pentecost narrative without deeply being cut in the conscience. To make the scriptural message meaningful the Indian Church should be able to make a thorough examination of conscience. First and for most, the Indian Church has not become a liberating force in the social fabric of the country. It is because of the unethical trend to conform to the values of the society and failure to challenge the society with the Christian values. The very fact that Christianity still remains a small minority in this subcontinent is itself a proof that the Church has failed in its apostolic responsibility.

The Jerusalem Pentecost pauses many challenges to the Indian Church. If the text has to have meaning for it, The Indian Church should rise up to face those challenges rather than run away from it. First and foremost, the Jerusalem Pentecost challenges the Church as to whether the Gospel message is heard in one's own language and culture by the Indian Christian Communities. The Christian message as it reaches the Indian sub continent with a unique and unparalleled spiritual culture looks like a foreign message clothed in a European garment. Even after so much serious thinking by theologians and passionate appeals to the Church authorities, the Christian message is not heard in his or her own language by the average Indian. This has two serious implications. On the one side the few who have responded positively to the Gospel message and have become members of the Church feel that their generous response has cut them away from their own people and culture. This is a serious situation, which needs immediate solution. People cannot live in their own land and among their own people with a foreign identity. But precisely this is the situation of the Indian Christians who struggle to reconcile their faith with their cultural context. Inculcation of Christianity in accordance with the ethos of the subcontinent is not simply desirable but inevitable and imperative. Sooner the Church wakes up to face the challenge the earlier the Christian message becomes meaningful to India.

10. AIR 1986, SC 991.

In our analysis of the Indian reality, especially the Indian ecclesial reality, we mentioned the ritual plurality of the Indian Catholic Community. This plurality is not a phenomenon of recent origin, but is as old as Christianity itself. Sometimes the ritual plurality is falsely compared with the cast difference in the Hindu society and associated with the caste affiliation and racial origin of the people belonging to these ritual groups. There is a common idea that the Eastern Churches of India want to maintain their differences because they belong to one particular caste of community. But the truth is far from it. In all the three individual Churches of the Catholic Communion in India there are members who trace their origin to different castes and races, both the forward castes and the backward castes. This means that whatever is the original caste or community to which the members of these churches belonged; they now possess a common ecclesial identity, which transcends their original caste differences. It is this ecclesial identity, which makes them an individual Church differentiated from other individual Churches. To be of a Church is the fundamental right of every Christian.

Another message the Jerusalem Pentecost teaches is that the stirrings of the Spirit is not an end in itself, but they should lead to faith in Christ. It is true that there is truth in various degrees in all the religions of the world and in a very special way in the religions of India with a long history of religiosity and spirituality. No one can deny the fact that the Spirit of God is actively present in the religions of India and that it is nothing but the Spirit that has been speaking through the sages of India down through the centuries. This recognition cannot stop there, because the Spirit of God does not lead people to Himself; rather He leads people to Christ. It is this truth that Peter, standing with the other Apostles, was eager to disseminate to the baffled and astonished audience. It is precisely this interpretation, which the Indian Church, the Church that claims the tradition of the Apostles, has most pitifully failed to give.

This has to be seen also against the background of Luke's view of history and how he makes use of the scripture to present his view. According to Luke the whole history is pointing towards Jesus the Messiah. The genealogy of Jesus in Luke is a clear case in context. From the first man Adam history has been leading up to Jesus. Luke's use of Scripture is to make clear that what happened in the OT has meaning only in the light of the Christ event. All the prophets spoke in

view of the Christ. This view of history cannot exclude any people or race from the saving activity of God whose will is that all should be saved in Jesus Christ. Luke inter-relates history and Scriptures and both together lead up to the Christ of God. As Conzelmann says, "Luke's view of history also determines his conception of Scripture, as it is evident from his use of Scripture proof. Here the continuity of salvation history is assumed. Scripture proof still focuses almost exclusively on Christology"¹¹. Theologians like Samartha¹² who deny the uniqueness of Jesus Christ are only making a mockery of the Christian Scriptures and doing injustice to the message of the Jerusalem Pentecost. His question "what has happened to millions of people before Christ" justifying his position that no uniqueness is to be claimed about Christ, shows that there is some basic error in understanding the Christian Scriptures and an over enthusiasm to dialogue with other religions. The Christ event took place at an appointed time in history, but this does not jeopardize the all-time significance of Christ. It is this truth that the Jerusalem Pentecost teaches us. The Spirit is the witness of Christ to lead people to the en-fleshed Word of God. If this does not happen, the Spirit himself becomes meaningless. It is true, "Mission is God's continuing activity through the Spirit to mend the brokenness of creation, to overcome the fragmentation of humanity, nature and God"¹³ This healing activity of the Spirit is sufficiently stressed in the Jerusalem Pentecost and that precisely is the universalism of the pericope. But the Spirit is the Spirit of God and it does not submit itself to the dictates of men. It is the Spirit of freedom. This freedom of the Spirit makes it a pointer towards Christ. This freedom of the Spirit is made actual in the experience of freedom by the masses. The words of Peter deserve special consideration. He says, "save yourselves from this corrupt generation"(Acts 2: 40). An India which is divided on the basis of castes and classes, which has found vast sections of its population, its own sons and daughters, marginalized and denied equality in social life and opportunity to rise up in economic field finds its saviour in Jesus Christ. The present situation of India is one that deserves to be qualified as "the corrupt generation". One who loves India cannot but also love its people.

11. Conzelmann. H, op.cit. p. xlvi

12. Cf. Samartha.S, *One Christ- Many Religions*, Maryknoll New York, Orbis Books 1991.

13. Ibid., p. 170

This love should impel him/her to find ways and means to liberate them. In whom else is it possible for the Indian masses to find a saviour if not in Jesus Christ?

7. Conclusion

The Jerusalem Pentecost is the first instance, according to Luke, of the powerful intervention of the Spirit of God in the life of the Church. It marks the beginning of the Church as a society distinct from the Jewish religion to which its first members belonged. It shows that those who are touched by the Spirit cannot remain part of a system, which has no power to liberate. The powerful message of the extraordinary phenomenon is “save yourselves from this corrupt generation”. The early Christians experienced freedom from the corrupt generation in the Church, which was a fellowship of brothers and sisters. This is a freedom, which unite all members into a universal fellowship, which transcends individual differences. Yet this universalism does, in fact, respect the individual differences and rights especially the right to hear the message of God “ in their own languages”.

Applied to the situation of the Indian Church, the Jerusalem Pentecost poses strong challenges. First and foremost the Church has to become a liberating force for the Indian masses living in a situation of oppression and marginalization. At least in its ideal form, the Church has the power to liberate and that precisely is the message of Peter to the people who were baffled by the extraordinary phenomenon. In Christ the Indian masses can find their liberator. This possibility cannot be denied to them by undue enthusiasm for religious dialogue or the kind. Accepting the fact that the Spirit speaks through religions, we have to point to Jesus as the force of liberation. This is just conceding to the right of the masses to come out of the situation of oppression and denial of equality. As Felix Wilfred says, “The passion and cross of Jesus are seen by the poor and the marginalized from a prophetic point of view. For the poor and the marginalized groups a meaningful point to be taken note of is from the Indian social history which has been marked as much by oppression as continuous resistance and protest against injustice inflicted on the poor and the weak...At least in its ideals- if not in practice Christianity has been a message of equality.”¹⁴

14. Wilfred. F, *On the Banks of Ganges, Doing Contextual Theology*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2002, pp 156-157.

Another message of the Jerusalem Pentecost for the Indian Church is that it has to respect the individuality and subsequent rights and privileges of all the three individual Churches of the Catholic communion. If any one of thesees individual Churches feels unduly being dominated by another Church or if any one them feels that opportunities are denied for it to develop in its own way, then the Indian Catholic Church cannot claim that it has understood the message of the Pentecost.

The Jerusalem Pentecost also challenges the Church with the need for inculturation. The present day Church of India in all its individual forms or ritual puts up a foreign appearance. In liturgy and theology, in customs and practices, all the three individual Churches of India need to go a long way towards making them truly Indian. What the Churches have acquired from the Parental ecclesial traditions have their meaning and significance. But their real significance is realized only when they are able to cope up with the cultures of the lands in which these ecclesial traditions are incarnated. The problem with the Indian Church is that it has not yet got incarnate in the Indian soil. This is true of all the three individual Churches of the Catholic communion. In fact, the very ecclesiality of these Churches is in jeopardy as long as they are not able to imbibe the culture of India in all its various aspects. The Churches have to become truly Indian so that through them the Indian men and women might be able to hear the message of the gospel in their own native language and culture.

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Acts 2:17-21: A Paradigm for a Collaborative Mission

Prema

This study of Acts 2:17-21 in which the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 is cited is seen as a model of action for the collaborative mission because the Spirit is given to the entire community. The gifts are very important for understanding the church as an inclusive community and its mission as collaborative. The leaders have the responsibility to identify and utilize the gifts in the community. The author of this article, Dr. (Sr.) Prema CSST, is Professor of New Testament at St. Peter's Seminary, Bangalore.

The church born at the Pentecost, fulfilling Joel's prophecy is described as a community of the Spirit in which discriminations of gender, age, or social class were set aside. The Spirit is not confined to one individual person but is a gift poured out on the entire community. The Acts of the Apostles reveals how the members of the community collaborate with one another in the journey of the Word'. The Spirit was found in the idea of one, developed in the mind of a second, adjusted by the experience of a third, purified by the opposition of a fourth. The leadership in this collaborative mission was characterised by an attitude of faith, capacity to dialogue, realism and daring. Their attitude was the acceptance of risks of faith and ways of God, acceptance to live an exodus process of moving out, of being displaced and yet trusting in God, to live new ways and a desire to move forward. They were prophets and prophetesses of their times, with contemplative vision of reality, deep faith, intense moments of prayer, ability to listen to the agony and ecstasy of the world, strength to face conflicts and resistance, challenges and oppositions in the face of changes.

I. Acts 2:17- 21 The Foundation for Collaborative Mission

After Jesus' ascension to his father, Peter proclaimed the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in the outpouring of God's spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2: 17-21). Though the text has no direct connotation to prophecy and prophetism it is a clear indication to the existence of prophets/prophetesses in the early church. It suggests that the prophetic charism continues to flourish in the early church along with other charisms.

1. Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21

A closer reading of Joel 2:28-32 and the Acts 2:17-21 will reveal two important divergences in the text when Peter was quoting Joel:

| Joel 2:28-32 (LXX 3:1-3) | Acts 2:17-21 |
|--|---|
| 2:28 It shall come to pass <i>afterwards</i> ; | 2:17 And <i>in the last days</i> it shall be; |
| 2:29 In those days I will pour out my Spirit. | 2:18 I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy. |

The divergences lie in two areas: one is in replacement and the other is in addition. Peter replaces '*afterwards*' (Joel 2:28) with '*in the last days*' (Acts 2:17). He makes an addition to Joel 2:29 by providing a phrase '*and they shall prophesy*' (Acts 2:18). Thus the word '*prophesy*' appears twice (vv. 17 and 18) in Peter's quote of Joel while Joel has it only once (2:28). What is the rhetoric of these dissimilarities? Or what do they point to? These divergences seem to be a conscious alteration by Luke. First by replacing the more precise phrase '*in the last days*' Luke points out that the age to come is the age of the presence of the Spirit¹ and its continuous activity in the Church² Secondly by adding the verb '*prophesy*' once more (in v. 18)³, Luke emphasizes the prophetic activity of the Spirit in the coming era.⁴ Further, there are three

1 The context of Joel's prophecy contains a call to repentance in hope of the divine forgiveness (Joel 2:12-14).

2 The Spirit is expressly involved in the four commission accounts: Acts 2:29; 10:19; 11: 12; 13: 2. It is also the source of apostolic and prophetic activity throughout the Book of Acts.

3 This is apart from Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28).

4 Peter's Pentecost discourse is widely accepted as a sort of inaugural address for the missionary work which encompasses the Act of the Apostles. R. Zehnic, *Peter's Pentecost and the Origin of the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Dare, 2 vols, Edinburgh, William and Norgate, 1875-1876, 123-31.

components (prophesy, vision, and dreams) in this text, which emphasize this fact. In other words, the effects of the Spirit's outpouring is the gift of prophecy, exercised in visions and dreams and by word of mouth.⁵

2. Elements of Prophecy in the Text of Joel (2:28-32 LXX 3:1-5) in Acts (2: 17-21)

The first element of prophecy in the text is '*in the last days*'. The text from Joel 2:28-32 was seen in the rabbinic tradition as referring to God's final intervention in history.⁶ Luke has further clarified this interpretation by the addition '*in the last days*' (Acts 2:17), thus specifying the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy. The next ingredient in the text of Joel is the promise that '*your sons and daughters shall prophesy*'. This promise is later on fulfilled in the Acts. Prophetic activity is expressly mentioned in Acts:

- Acts 11:28 Agabus foretells about the famine;⁷
- Acts 13:1-3 The prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch are directed to select Paul and Barnabas for missionary work;
- Acts 15:32 The prophets Judas and Silas exhort the congregation at Antioch;
- Acts 21:9 Mention is made of the four unmarried daughters of Philip;
- Acts 21:10-11 Agabus foretells Paul's arrest in Jerusalem by symbolic act resembling that of an Israelite prophet.

In a more general sense, the entire book of the Acts can be viewed as the record of prophetic activity inspired by the Holy Spirit.

A third element of prophecy goes on to predict, "your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams" (2:17).⁸ It is interesting to note that the nineteen commissions in the Acts occur⁹ in

5 F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 61.

6 As seen by R. Zehnic, *Peter's Pentecost* 1, 29- 30.

7 Here the tendency is to identify prophecy with uncovering the future by the Spirit that there would be a worldwide famine.

8 Acts 10:10; cf. 9:10; 16: 9; 18: 9; 22: 17-19, 27. Visions and dreams (Joel 3:1= Acts 2:17) are specific manifestations of prophecy, cf. Num 12: 6.

9 With one possible exception, namely 22:12-16, where Ananias commissions Paul. For a detailed analysis of the commission accounts in Acts. B. J. Hubbard, "The role of the commissioning Accounts in Acts" 192-194.

visions, five of which are further described as occurring at night in dreams. The word *orama* (vision) is used in several of the epiphanies. The quotation from Joel then repeats the promise of the Spirit's outpouring (Acts 2:17); and Luke may have added the words *kai propheteusousin* (and they shall prophesy) missing in the LXX. In any case this second mention of the Spirit is also linked to the gift of prophecy.

The next element in the quotation is the "wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below" (2:19), which will accompany the last days. The expression, "wonders and signs" is also used by Stephen in 7: 36 to describe how Moses led the Israelites.¹⁰ Perhaps this explains the divinely aided activity of the apostles. With respect to the apocalyptic wonders described in the Joel quotation "blood and fire...turned into blood" (Acts 2:19-20) could testify a foreshadowing of the end.¹¹ The quotation of Joel by Peter in his keynote address at Pentecost gives the author of Acts a text from the prophets, which he can link to much of the subsequent narrative of prophetic activities in Acts.

3. Prophets/ Prophetesses in the Primitive Community

In several passages in the Acts, the phenomenon of prophecy is ascribed to Christian disciples in general.¹² Acts refers to twelve individuals as prophets/prophetesses or as regularly exercising the prophetic gift: Agabus (11:27-28; 21:10-11); Judas and Silas (15:32); Barnabas, Simon who was called Niger, Lucien of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul (13:1) and the four virgin daughters of Philip the Evangelist (21:8-9).¹³ Acts contains a wealth of information regarding prophecy and other revelatory phenomena in earliest Christianity. It reflects a close relationship between the Holy Spirit and prophecy; the Spirit is the one who speaks through the prophets. The Spirit can be referred to as

10 B. J. Hubbard, "The role of the commissioning Accounts in Acts," 195, n 30.

11 Ibid, 95.

12 There was a widespread view that in early Christianity all Christians were potential prophets if not actual ones. For the Apocalypse this claim is made by D. Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *NTS* 18 (1971-72) 262- 274, E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, Studies in the New Testament, F. Clarke, trans., London, SCM, 1961, 134-35.

13 Peter also was not called 'prophet', nevertheless has the mark of a prophet. For example in the knowledge of men's hearts, Acts 5: 3; 8: 21-23, and in the experience and proclamation of revelation in visions and dreams.

speaking even when an unmentioned prophet was doubtlessly the revelatory medium (Acts 15:28; 20:23). Prophecy, however, is but one of the many manifestations of the Spirit; others include speech, speaking in tongues, the act of praising God, the performance of miracles.

4. Role of the Christian Prophets

Certain functions of the Christian prophets are clearly reminiscent of the role of the prophets in the Old Testament. These include the prediction of future events (Acts 11:28; 20:23, 25; 27:22), the declaration of divine judgments (Acts 13:11; 28: 25-28), and the employment of symbolic actions (Acts 21:11). Besides these there are two important functions of the prophets in Acts: to exhort and strengthen the disciples; to expound the Scriptures. We shall treat these two functions in some detail.

a. Exhorting and Strengthening the Disciples

Can we say that ‘exhorting and strengthening the disciples’ amounts to a prophetic function? Luke’s use of *parakalew* or *paraklesis* with reference to Christian prophets is relatively frequent. The verb is used to describe the proclamation of the Baptist (Lk 3:18; cf 7:26) as well as the ministry of those in the Acts who are designated prophets.¹⁴ As a description of Peter’s preaching, it may be one of the prophetic traits that characterises Luke’s presentation of the apostle’s ministry. In Acts 15:32 the phrase *parakalew* and *episthrezw* (exhort and strengthen) is specifically connected to the prophetic role of Judas and Silas. It is found nowhere else in the New Testament, except in the Acts 14:22 used for the prophets Paul and Barnabas.¹⁵

The noun *paraklesis* which occurs in the New Testament¹⁶ is associated by Luke with the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Palestinian community is increased by the *paraklesis* of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31);

14 Barnabas (Acts 11:23); Paul and Silas (Acts 16:40); Paul Acts (20:2) It is noteworthy, however, that the term is not used to describe the ministry of Jesus.

15 F. J. F. Jackson and K. Lake, eds. *The Beginnings of Christianity* 6, London, Macmillan, 1933, 182, noting the parallelism between Acts 15:27 and Acts 15:32 translate ‘Judas and Silas themselves being the prophets...’ and rejects the reading ‘who also were themselves prophets’, with its allusion to Acts 13:1-2.

16 Only in Luke-Acts, Pauline epistles and Letter to the Hebrews.

the prophets Paul and Barnabas are invited by the synagogue officials of Antioch to give a word of *paraklesis*, i.e. an exposition of the Scripture (Acts 13:15); the Jerusalem Decree which is given through the Holy Spirit, is termed *paraklesis* (Acts 15:28, 31).¹⁷ Furthermore, the written *paraklesis* of the Jerusalem Decree, placed side by side with the term “son of the *paraklesis*” and applied to Barnabas in the Acts 4: 46, possibly represents ‘son of the prophecy’. ¹⁸

The understanding of *paraklesis* as the specific ministry of prophecy, is supported by Pauline literature. In 1 Cor 14:2-4, the prophet’s ministry of ‘edification’ is accompanied by means of *paraklesis* and *paramuthia*.¹⁹ They are not a special office, but are a part of the work of prophecy.²⁰

A similar expression is given in Rom 15:4-5, where the text refers to *paraklesis* and in 2 Cor 5: 20 where God exhorts the Christian community of Corinth through Paul and Timothy (cf. 2 Thess 2:16-17). In Paul *paraklesis* is not always explicitly identified as a Spirit-mediated eschatological reality or even as a charism. It can be listed alongside, and distinct from, *propheteia* (Rom 12:8). Nevertheless, it probably has a special connection with Christian prophecy, even when that connection is not explicitly expressed.²¹

In the light of the above considerations, it is likely that Judas and Silas were engaged in their ministry of *paraklesis* in the Acts 15:32, because they were prophets.²² The comparison between their verbal exhortation Acts 15:27-28 with the written 12: 31, and also prophetic *paraklesis* of the Jerusalem Decree provide the clue that exhortation and strengthening the disciples were one of the distinct characteristics of the Christian prophets in Acts.²³ In Luke’s thought *paraklesis* is then

17 O. Schmitz, “*Parakalew, Paraklesis*,” TDNT 6, 794-96.

18 E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978, 131.

19 There, it is said of the primitive Christian prophet that he edifies, exhorts, and comforts. G. Stählin, “*Paramutheomai*, TDNT 5, 822. In Paul the term *Paraklesis* and *Paramuthia* seem to be combined in some way.

20 G. Stählin, “*Paramutheomai*,” TDNT 5, 822; E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 132.

21 E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 132.

22 E. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1971.

23 E. Käsemann has called our attention to the parallel between Acts 15: 28 and the edict of the Spirit reflected in 1 Cor 14:37. Käsemann points to the words

one way in which the Christian prophets exercise their ministry. Hence in the context of I5: 32 it is a form of prophecy.²⁴

b. The Interpretation of the Scriptures: Acts 13:16- 41

A second distinctive characteristic of the role of the Christian prophet is the interpretation of the Scriptures. It is a key feature of the mission of the prophets Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, as well as other Christian leaders (e.g. Acts 2:14-36; 3: 12-26; 4:8-12 Peter; 6:9-11; 7:2-53 Stephen; 8:30-35 Philip; 9:20-22; 13:5; 16-41; 17:2, 10-11, 17; 18:4; 19:8; 26:22-23; 18:24-28 Apollos). This manner of teaching is deliberated in the Acts 13:16-41 in the form of a synagogue address. It may or may not signify that the prophets in question were also ‘teachers’.²⁵ To what degree then can it be regarded as prophetic? The interpretation of the Scripture as an activity of a prophet was not unknown in the first century since it was explicitly ascribed to Daniel (9:2, 24).²⁶ It may be inferred also from other Old Testament texts in which the prophets use and reapply older biblical phraseology and ideas.²⁷ These phenomena support the view of those who connect the prophets with the origins of synagogue and regard them as the first to dispense religious teachings in such assemblies.²⁸ Prophets were also regarded as those who strengthened the religious consciousness of the people by readings from the Scriptures, followed by teachings and exhortation, and consolation.²⁹ The rabbinic tradition reflects a similar picture. According to the *Targum*

set forth in the Decree, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.’ Paul expresses the same thought in 1Cor 14:37.

- 24 E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 132.
- 25 The exposition of the Scriptures is ascribed to Barnabas Acts 13:5; 14:1, but not to Silas. Also this activity in Acts is not described as ‘prophecy’ nor limited to ‘prophets.’
- 26 Daniel is the interpreter of Jeremiah 25:11-13; 27:10, 70 years to be fulfilled over the ruins of Jerusalem, Dan 9:1, 2-4, 20- 27. R. Meyer “*Prophètes*,” *TDNT* 6, 1968, 819- 820.
- 27 For example Jer 48: 45 with Num 21: 28; 24: 17; Jer 50: 51 with Isa 13-14; Zeph 2:15 with Isa 47: 8. Dan 11:30 as a reinterpretation of Num 24: 4. E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 133 n 196.
- 28 L. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Verträge der Juden*, Hildesheim, 1966, 376; S. Kraus, *Synagogale Altertümer*, Hildesheim, 1966, 154 as recorded by E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 133.
- 29 I. Elbogen, *Der Jüdische Gottesdienst*, Herder, 1967, 235.

on Judges (5:9),³⁰ Deborah, under prophetic inspiration, did not cease to give expositions on the Torah.³¹ Moreover the rabbis regarded themselves as teachers of Israel and successors of the prophets. They sat in Moses' seat, according to Mathew (23:2).³²

Further the choice of Judas and Silas to accompany the Decree suggests that these prophets also had some authority on the biblical exposition of the Decree (Acts 15:16-18). The theme of the citation, the inclusion of the Gentiles, is specifically a 'mystery', which according to Paul, has now been revealed to Christ's apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This theme is, in turn, directly related to the 'new temple', a major motif in the *legei kurios* quotations (Eph 2:20- 21; cf. Acts 7:48-50; 2 Cor 6: 16-17). These facts suggest that the prophets, Judas and Silas, were not chosen at random to accompany the Decree. Probably they were chosen because they had already exercised an influential role in establishing (proclaiming) the biblical rationale upon which the provisions of the Decree were justified.³³

5. Role of the Christian Prophetesses in the Primitive Church

Women in the primitive church possessed the spirit of prophecy, though they were not called prophetesses very often. Besides Acts 2:17-19, the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, we have two concrete texts in the New Testament for our evidence: Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5. Acts 21:9 will be considered here in detail.

Although Acts has spoken several times about Philip (6:5; 8: 5, 26-40), his daughters, the four virgin prophetesses, are mentioned for the first time at the end of Paul's missionary activity. The information about them is very sparse. The text gives no hint about their prophetic activity or the mode of their functioning. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain with certainty in what sense they were prophetesses and in what type of prophetic ministry they were engaged in. We can only make certain

30 Targum on Judges.

31 R. Meyer, "Prophetes," TDNT 6, 817. According to the rabbinic traditions prophets are the oldest expositors of the law authorized by the Spirit and they have their limited and specific task in the Divine plan of salvation.

32 R. Meyer, "Prophetes", TDNT 6, 818-819.

33 E. E. Ellis, Prophecy, 137-138.

assumptions from the situations of that time and from the clue provided by the text itself.

One assumption is that there was an apparently recognized group of prophets/prophetesses whom God appointed in the church (e.g. 1 Cor 12:28; cf. 14: 29-31; Acts 20:28), and the daughters of Philip might have belonged to this group. Earlier writers have acknowledged the existence of such a group. H. B Swete distinguishes between those in the primitive church, who on occasion prophesied, and a relatively small number, known as 'the prophets', forming a charismatic order, to which recognized position was given in the church.³⁴ The second assumption is that these women belonged either to a prophetic fraternity but exercised their independent ministry in their place or they prophesied in a prophetic group. They might have exercised it within, or apart from Christian worship; or they gave solo prophetic utterances within the frame-work of Christian worship or in a private setting.³⁵

The third possibility is that the daughters of Philip might have belonged to a select number of 'leading men' (an women) (Acts 15:22), to whom Luke restricts the term *Proph̄ctes* and who exercised considerable influence in the Christian community.³⁶ A fourth possibility is that there were Christians who had the prophetic charism or the Spirit of prophecy. Though not called prophetesses they had the mark of a prophet, for example, in the knowledge and proclamation of revelations in visions and dreams. This fourth possibility seems to be more probable. But while considering this, we must also bear in mind that although prophecy is a possibility for any Christian, it is primarily identified with certain leaders who exercise it as a ministry. In this sense the daughters of Philip are distinguished as persons who have the prophetic charism as a continuing possession. However, prophecy in the Acts is represented as an eschatological power of the Spirit from God (Acts 2:17) and thus the daughters of Philip also had this power or the 'Spirit of prophecy.' This seems to be one of the implications of the verb 'prophesied' in Acts 21:9. But the specific function of these persons is difficult to

34 H. B. Swete. *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, London, Macmillan, 1910, 377.

35 This assumption is inferred from the three types of prophetic activity discovered by Aune in the early Christianity. D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 198.

36 E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy*, 129-130.

establish. We can only speculate that through the Spirit of prophecy, they are empowered to be the witnesses to the content of the Gospel. They were mediators of the confident assurance of the Gospel testimony to the believer, guiding and encouraging them. Thus they were provided with charismata, which made the content of the witness more dramatic and effective, including signs and wonders alongside the preaching. The charismatic wisdom enhances their speech event and other forms of inspirations.³⁷ It might have been in the context of a liturgy that prophecy took the form of prayer. In the light of the above discussion the assertion of Acts 21:9 that the daughters of Philip prophesied would mean that they had the prophetic gift and they exercised it in the interest of the community. That there was little or no distinction of gender in the prophetic gift is shown by this reference, and is hinted at in the quotation from Joel in the Acts 2:18. And later, Paul takes it for granted that women would be found praying and prophesying at a Christian meeting (1Cor 11:5).³⁸

II. The Present Scenario

The church in India today is journeying in the world of religious conflict. Those who watch the Indian scenario will observe the violent movements towards ethno-centrism and religious fundamentalism. Evaluating other religions and cultures in the light of ones own is ethnocentrism. This brings out comparative merits and demerits of religions and the concreting of the superiority claims of a particular one and defiling the others. While ethnicity is good ethnocentrism is to be viewed with suspicion. The highest form of ethnocentrism leads to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a world wide and inter-religious phenomenon. In different forms we meet it in all religions, in Christianity as well as in Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

1. Root cause of religious fundamentalism

The tendency to institutionalize the God experience of the founders of religious movements has at time, resulted in distorting the reality, which has been transmitted by them to successive generations. In

37 M. Turner, "The Spirit of Prophecy as the Power of Israel's Restoration and Witness," *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds. I. H. Marshall and D. Petersons, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998, 330.

38 H. A. Guy, *New Testament Prophecy: Its Origin and Significance*, London, Epworth, 1947, 93.

Judaism it is manifested in the complicated legal systems and rituals. In Hinduism it has led to the irrational beliefs which dominate the lives of the people leading to superstitious as well as discriminating caste system dividing the people into higher and lower groups, into elite and dalit classes. In Islam it has absolutized the religious principles in such a way that they even use violence to affirm them. In Christianity the quest for religiosity takes a literary form an intensely renewed attachment to the book of the Bible. Sometimes religiosity could be the end product of blind acceptance of interpretations and directives from the elders resulting from a false notion of respect or may be due to lethargy or inertia to study the matter in depth. The conflict among the religions is nothing but the confrontation between the institutionalized patterns of religiosity, which has deformed the original God experience of the founder or the founding community.

2. Diagnosis of fundamentalism in the catholic church

Fundamentalism is no more a strange phenomenon even in the Catholic Church, the features of which are the following

a. Institutionalisation

Institutions though good in themselves, can face deterioration through institutionalisation. When the church becomes institutionalised to the extent of losing the very missionary thrust, the sovereignty of a God gets disregarded. However institutions are good to the extent they help in giving the power back to the people that they may lead a better life. The institution itself possesses the prophetic charism but it can be fossilized in the absence of charisma. The result will be ‘ecclesio-centrism’ and ‘maintenance attitude’

b. Ecclesio-centrism

Theologian Avery Dulles lamented in an article in America that the catholic church is developing to a point of ‘ecclesio-centrism’. “The church has become too introverted. The catholic church is highly sacramental, institutional and hierarchical in its structures. Its activities are primarily directed toward the institution.”³⁹ It is an accepted axiom that only when energy is directed outward rather than inward, the result will be lifegiving.

39 L. Sofield and D.H. Kuhan, *The Collaborative Leader*, St. Paul's, Bombay, 1998, 73.

c. Maintenance attitude

There is sometimes a loss of the sense of the gospel because of the need on the part of leadership to maintain the institution- the excessive amount of resources that go into status-quo and thought and action that keep the church from its broader role of reaching out beyond its own organisational boundaries. The maintenance attitude keeps the church from being relevant. It drains the energy required for ministry and pastoral response. The institutional church is too focussed on being what it once was and not open enough to being what it can be, what it should be. As a result the world is moving past the church and the church is playing ‘catch up’ all the time and not able to respond to people’s needs. People need to find out that the Gospel and the spiritual dimension of religious life can offer them some succour and help them lead richer, fuller lives. People’s hunger can be met only by a church, which is actively living and spreading the Lord’s message. The effect of institutionalisation is the erosion of the church’s credibility, degeneration into power politics, the domination of the strong, replacement of spirituality by religiosity, vision and mission are interpreted in the context of clericalism and triumphalism.

III. Challenges of the church in the Collaborative Mission

No longer we envisage mission in terms of the church’s expansion but in terms chiefly of the reign of God, its advent and growth in the hearts and lives of women and men, in human relationships and social realities. As such it posits certain challenges.

1. Transformation of the church

In the vision of the collaborative mission the transformation of the church itself, her conversion from the idols of casetism, sexism and hierarchisms of power and mammon are significant factors. She needs to be remoulded as a family of God in which all are brothers and sisters and recognise the prophetic spirit enshrined in the people of God⁴⁰. In describing the prophetic charism of the people of God the constitutions speak first about the duty of all Christians, especially the laity to be a “living witness to Christ especially by a life of faith and love.” The

40 S. Rayan, “Vision of Mission for the New Millennium Dalit Perspective”, in *A Vision of Mission in the New Perspective*, eds. T. Mallipurath and L. Stansilaus, St. Paul’s Mumbai, 2001, 119.

church is based on the word of God which must be preserved in full integrity. The integrity of the Christian faith is entrusted to the whole community of believers not only to the hierarchical magisterium (LG 12).

2. Prophetic Life Style

Ultimately the primary mission of the church is to become a church which fosters a vision based on the compassionate response which Jesus offered to all who suffer, especially the poor and the disenfranchised. Today people long for a church which reflects the values of the early apostolic church, the church described in the Acts of the Apostles. The early church primarily was a community whose organising principle was readiness for the generous sharing shown by its members and their acting as advocates of peace. The big problem in the world today is its tremendous materialism. The ideal of giving and sharing and accepting other people need be shown in the lifestyle of the church, rather than in the verbosity of the church documents.

Theology too has to be prophetic both in its analyses of contemporary events and in the alternative vision that goes counter to the vision of dominant group. The prophetic message is always derived from a reflection on what is going around him\her. The analyses of the prophets demonstrate, how intimately our experience of God is linked to our patterns of social behaviour and unveils what our society and structure are not. The culmination of the prophetic theology lies in projecting a vision of what they should be, and how they should minimise moralising.

3. Learn from the People

Another challenge of the church is to listen to the people to monitor social processes, and even participate in legitimate struggles of the people. The presence of struggles among the people indicates the rise of a new consciousness. This implies the church needs to be culture-sensitive. Faith tradition grows and becomes enriched only when it interacts creatively and critically with contemporary human social processes.

4. Feminisation of the Church

John D'Mello explains what feminisation is (Paradigm for a feminisation of the church FABC1998). It is not meant to be a church with 'feminine' face (nor with a masculine) or a church with feminine characteristics, nor even a church with a more visible female presence. It is a process whereby the church requires an egalitarian consciousness.

It is only then that there will be true discipleship of equals and an end to all forms of discrimination, not just gender discrimination. Men and women, young and old, elite and dalit need to be in partnership in the mission of the church.

5. Gospel Imperative: The Form of Leadership

In discerning the direction of vision and mission for the church at the start of the 21st century what ought to be the priorities of Christian leadership? Isn't it to be prophetic-ready to take risk and to be able to look way ahead to take a plunge into the near and distant future, empowered and empowering others with ones faith rooted in the veracity of the word received, to be transformational creating a culture in which performance of the church is high, and to be democratic which encourages and approves participation of the people? It needs to be grounded on the priorities of Jesus and enunciated as a kind of contemporary litany of beatitudes. Blessed are the leaders:

- who believe in the power of prayer
- respond to the needs of the poor
- promote peace
- confront the 'isms'
- foster the right of the deprived
- challenge social ills
- empower women

Conclusion

Acts 2: 17- 21 is a vision of the church in the New Era. It is a paradigm for a collaborative mission where the prophetic Spirit energises men and women, young and old, Jews and Gentiles for a collaborative mission. It clearly identifies what collaboration involves for contemporary Christian leaders. The Church is a community of collaborative mission. The process for the leaders who wish to develop a collaborative community involves three major tasks: 1) to help each member see his\her baptism as a call to holiness and mission 2) to assist all the members to discern and discover their personal gifts and charism so that they might be used in mission and to the spread of the Kingdom 3) to see the leaders' primary role and responsibility as fostering participation of all the people of God in the mission of the church. This

paradigm emphasizes the pre-eminence of gifts as the foundation for collaborative mission. It also stresses the role of leaders in developing and utilising charisms found in the community. This is the model Jesus practiced. The theological foundation for collaborative mission is foreshadowed in the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy at Pentecost when the prophetic Spirit was poured out on the Christian community. And later in the Acts of the Apostles we find a group working together to develop the young Christian church. A critical decision made very clear at the Jew- Gentile debate was that the church should be inclusive rather than exclusive.

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The Growth of the Community Through Struggles (Acts 2:42-4:37): Challenges of the Church in India

**Mathew Thekkara
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The struggles the Christian community has to go through as narrated in Acts 2:42-4, 37 are not obstacles to growth but incentives. The church responded to the challenges then, and it shows how it must take up the same challenge today. The contributors of this article are Dr. Mathew Thekkara SDB and Dr. Thomas Punnapadam SDB, who are Professors of New Testament at Christu Jyothi College, Bangalore.

The Acts of the Apostles is one of the most exciting and challenging books in the Christian Bible. It deals primarily with the growth of the Church. As a consequence, the Acts must be carefully read and thoughtfully interpreted. This implies that the text must be examined in light of different interpretative interests and cultural sensibilities. With this in mind, we shall try to read the text of the Acts from "behind the text" or "in the text" or "in front of the text". This will lead us to look through the Acts to see the challenges of the Church in India. The Acts of the Apostles can be called the "Book of the Holy Spirit"¹ The Holy Spirit is the "life-principle" of the Church.

1. Literary Forms

In the writing of the Acts Luke makes use of different literary forms like summaries, speeches and parallelisms. Narrative summaries like 2:42-47; 4:32-35 reveal the first Christian community's inner life.

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Sacra Pagina Series, 5; Ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 14. From now on as Johnson, *The Acts*.

Speeches like 1:4-8, 16-22; 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12, 24-30 represent Luke's understanding of what should have been said on the occasion and his comments on the events he is relating. Literary parallelisms are found in Luke's Gospel and Acts. By means of this he communicates the basic truth that the apostles are prophetic successors of Jesus².

2. Luke's Presentation of Jesus and the Apostles

Jesus is portrayed as a prophet like Moses. He is the risen Jesus and so he is the "raised prophet" who speaks authoritatively through the wonders and speeches of the apostles whom Luke presents as prophets. Luke communicates the fact that the apostles are prophetic successors of Jesus. The prophetic pattern structures the Gospel of Luke and his Acts of the Apostles. The first chapters of Acts provide the key to reading all of the Gospel and Acts as the story of the "Prophet and the People". The Gospel of Luke is the time of the first sending of the prophet, Jesus. Acts continues the story of the prophet's second and more powerful sending of the people, the apostles, with the offer of a second chance at accepting "God's visitation" through the appearances of the Risen Christ, and thereby their salvation³.

3. Positive Growth of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 2:42-47)

Jesus proclaimed the good news to Israel in Jerusalem. The majority of Israel refused to accept Christ. That does not mean that God's chosen people have not been faithful. A great number of Jews, a remnant, actually accepted the gospel. They formed the first Christian community of Jerusalem. Thus there was here a restoration of Israel. We know that about three thousands were added to the community (Acts 2:41). Day by day the Lord added to their number new members (2:47). "Many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). This community was constituted as "one mind and heart" (Acts 4:32) by the Spirit of God. He led them to call nothing their own and to share all their possessions⁴.

The instruction of the apostles, the fellowship and collection for the poor, the celebration of the Eucharist, the common prayers: these made up the inner life of the new born church. These can be seen as the four parts of the early Christian liturgy: the "liturgy of the Word", the collection for the poor, the "liturgy of the Eucharist," and prayers of thanksgiving.

2. Johnson, *The Acts*, 9-10, 71.

3. Johnson, *The Acts*, 13.

4. Johnson, *The Acts*, 91.

Thus the celebration of the liturgy is the image in miniature of the whole life of the community⁵.

The gift of the Spirit brought about a community that realized the highest aspirations of human longing: unity, peace, joy, and the praise of God. This ideal of the Jerusalem Church has had an unparalleled impact on later Christianity that looked back to the Apostolic Age as the time when the Church was most perfectly realized⁶.

The Church in India is challenged by the Jerusalem community to foster "one mind and heart" (4:32) attitude among its members. A one mind and heart attitude will open up their eyes to the millions of people suffering without anything to eat. This kind of mind and heart will lead them to an inner life guided by the liturgy constituted by the Word of God, a collection for the poor, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and thanksgiving prayers. Such a life will assure unity and love among the Indian Christians and bring them joy and peace.

4. Sharing (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)

Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35 are beautiful summaries that speak of the early Christian community. "All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned were held in common" (Acts 4:32). The social character is that the conditions of the least, lame, lost and last are transformed. The rich and the famous are not privileged. God's liberating love reaches all who call upon him. God's kingdom reflects solidarity and mutuality than class system. Believers are to live together and have all things in common⁷.

Since the first Christian community bears witness to solidarity and mutuality and not class system, the Church in India has to look at the following unpleasant facts: racial differences that are present in her; cultural variations of upper and lower caste differences in dealings with

5. Justin Taylor, "Acts of the Apostles", *The International Bible Commentary*, Ed. William R. Farmer (Bangalore: TPI, 2004) 1587. From now on Taylor, "Acts of the Apostles".

6. Johnson, *The Acts*, 62.

7. Robert W. Wall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002) 72-73. From now on Wall, *the Acts*.

Christians in India; the social barriers between the employer and the employee, the rich and the poor; fights between different linguistic groups in parishes; and disagreements among members of the Syrian Rite and the Latin Rite. Such things are taking place in the Church though it confesses that "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11).

Acts 4:32-37 speaks about sharing of goods manifesting a willingness to redistribute to others according to their financial need. In 4:32 we are told "no one claimed private ownership of any possessions". This does not mean that they are not the legal owners of their possessions (cf 5:4), but instead of putting these for their own exclusive use they put them at the disposal of all. The statement "there was not a needy person among them" (4:34) recalls Deut 15:4, "there will... be no one in need among you". So the early Christian community is shown as the people of God, keeping God's Law and enjoying the blessing that is promised to those who fulfill the divine commands. This implied a level of intimacy and commitment to the other members of the community. "There was not a needy person among them" because those who possessed lands or houses used to sell them and bring the price they got for them to the apostles and the proceeds were then distributed to any who might be in need. According to 2:45 the distribution was to "any who had need". In 4: 34 the distribution is organized for the benefit of the needy within the community. Here the apostles became overseers, looked after the goods of the community, and saw to the needs of the widows and orphans. Barnabas carried out as an individual what has just been said about the group as a whole (4:36-37).⁸

"As many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and was distributed to each as any had need" (4:34b-35). Such a work was done under the authority of the apostles. All the possessions were held in common thus revealing the apostles' increasing grip on the inner life and destiny of all the believers⁹. What would this mean to the Christian leaders in India to invigorate and inspire the church by their teaching and example to act against the grain of an acquisitive and materialistic

8. Taylor, "Acts of the Apostles," 1591-1592.

9. Wall, *The Acts*, 100-101.

culture? Is the stand we have taken vis-à-vis globalization justifiable against the challenge of "one mind and heart" given us by the early church?

5. The Struggle with the Sanhedrin

It is leadership that opposes the apostles. In that context, Peter cast the "stone which the builders rejected" (Ps 118:22) at the Sanhedrin directly and said that Jesus is the stone scorned by you the builders. The leaders responded to his last speech with his arrest. The leaders are upset because they are proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. "Let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in his name. So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:17-18). Yet they cannot deny that the power of resurrection is at work with the apostles. The person cured was an example of it. Many believed the preaching of apostles and entered into the communities formed by them. This was showing them that the apostles became the true leaders of the faithful Israel, not the members of the Sanhedrin¹⁰.

They "commanded them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus" (4:18). The freedom of speech was removed from them as speech allows the prophet to afflict the comfortable without fear of reprisal and give equal right to comfort the afflicted without fear of ridicule. Tragically, this is often not the case within the church. The community of believers should learn to tolerate thoughtful opinions to be voiced and the capacity of the prophets to challenge them¹¹.

The church in India is facing a strong opposition from Hindutva movements. The church is not to kill the wounded Christians. She has, instead, to heal their wounds and prevent them from being wounded further. That requires the strengthening of Christians in our motherland to their attachment to Christ and to practicing the love of others, even their enemies. The 8th AGM of ICA held at NBCLC, Bangalore, on 3-6- Feb. 2004 had the opportunity to listen to a panel of witnesses who shared their experiences of witnessing in a struggling church. Mrs. Gladys Staines gave a very touching testimony of her experience of forgiveness; Fr. Christudas spoke of the trial of being paraded naked in public; Sr. Selmi Paul testified to the selfless service rendered by Sr. Rani Maria who was brutally murdered on 25 Feb. 1995; report of the brutal putting to death of Fr. Amaladoss on 1 Sept. 1999; and the narration

10. Johnson, *The Acts*, 80-81.

11. Wall, *The Acts*, 93.

about the three Salesian martyrs killed by extremists near Imphal on 15 May 2001. The church has to defend herself against these enemies of Christianity which requires challenging their beliefs and practices and seeking of other means of defence for today.

6. The Authority of the Apostles

The apostles slowly emerge as the effective rulers of the restored Israel. They are empowered by Christ (Acts 4:23-31). They receive power through prayer for healing others and for working signs and wonders. The members of the Sanhedrin are unable to bridge the division between the repentant and unrepentant Israel. Hence it is time for the Twelve to mount Israel's thrones to shepherd all the people of Israel¹². While talent & a fine education are worthy attributes of a Christian leader, there is simply no substitute for the spiritually mature believer whose leadership reflects the rule of the spirit in church's life.

To help the poor of the Christian community of Jerusalem there is now a fund to which the wealthier members contribute. The fund is administered by the apostles, who also supervise the distribution to the needy. Previously those who sold their possessions gave to the poor directly. Now they bring the price of the sale to the apostles. They take on a new ministry resembling that of the *episcopoi* ("overseer", whence our "bishops") in the early church, who looked after the goods of the community and saw to the needs of the widows and orphans¹³.

The authority of the Bishops in India need not lie on the strength of their financial capacities, but on their power to heal their flocks from their wrong attitudes and practices in their lives and enrich them in prayer and cater to the needs of their brothers and sisters at the present time. There is, perhaps, need of greater sharing of responsibilities regarding the administration of the church property. Is the official church proud that the city of Mumbai hosted the World Social Forum?

The hallmark of the theological conception of the Acts of the Apostles is its universalism. But it has only one route: God, the only God, has a single plan according to which no one except Jesus can mediate salvation to all people (Acts 4:12).

7. The Healing of the Crippled Beggar (Acts 3:1-10)

The apostles carry on the prophetic power of Jesus in their deeds

12. Wall, *The Acts*, 91.

13. Taylor, "Acts of the Apostles", 1592.

and words. The apostles were frequenting the temple to pray. On the way they see a beggar, but they have no money to give him. Instead they work "signs and wonders" by healing him. Such an action of Peter stimulates a positive response among the people. His cure worked "to heal the people of God". Peter's healing of the outcast and marginalized concretised his mission to "proclaim good news to the poor". The final goal of Jesus' healings was the restoration of the sick person to full participation in the life of the people. The same purpose is reiterated in this healing of the crippled man by the apostle¹⁴.

Peter's command to the crippled, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (Acts 3:6), is a believer's confession of the continuing authority of the living Jesus. Peter's words to the crippled beggar are words that issue in new life precisely because they are words of profound confidence in the present authority of Jesus to heal the lame and save the lost. The lame was ritually impure and forbidden to go in to the temple (Lev 21:18). The crippled stood, walked and entered the temple. That was restoration to the membership in the restored Israel of God. The beggar's entrance to the temple, to the shouts of holy praise, symbolizes a religious restoration. Since he is now restored to a community of faith, he is able to worship God with them¹⁵.

One of the things in which the church in India is crippled is the lack of equality among Christians. Whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, high or low in office or privileges, skilled or unskilled, tall or short, wise or foolish, we are all equal before God with our role and positions remaining unchanged. This is a reality that has to be fostered in the church by Bishops, Priests, Nuns and Lay People.

8. The Speech of Peter (Acts 3:11-26)

Peter's speeches constitute another connection between the apostles and Jesus. Like him, they are now "teaching in the temple" and like him, their teaching is intimately connected to the powerful deeds they perform. Some of the elements of Peter's speech are the following:

- a. His speech shows a connection between the healing of the cripple and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 3:16). The power at work in Peter and John is not their own, but comes from the "one whom God glorified", Jesus.

14. Johnson, *The Acts*, 71-72.

15. Wall, *The Acts*, 84-85.

- b. The speech pays special attention to the rejected portion of the kerygmatic statement. The people preferred a murderer in the place of Jesus, the author of life, and demanded Jesus' death even when Pilate wanted to release him. "You killed the author of life whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). Luke makes the execution of Jesus the primary symbol of unrepentant Israel and believing that Jesus is God's Messiah is the primary mark of repentant Israel. The people are implicated as much as their leaders. Peter mitigates it a bit by stating that they and their leaders had acted in ignorance, "I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders" (3:17). In this God was fulfilling his predictions about a suffering Messiah (3:18). These statements open up for them the possibility for repentance.
- c. The call to conversion (3:17-26). "Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). Peter's emphasis is on "the God of our fathers" who raised Jesus from the dead. These deeds of power are an offer of hope to the Israelites as the "people of God" (3:9,11,12,13). The Messiah was designed "for them" (3:20). The blessing of Abraham is sent "first to you" (3:26). This call to conversion has a double edge, containing both promise and threat.

Their conversion will mean the "wiping out" of their sins (3:19) and a turning away of each person from one's wicked deeds (3:26). This will lead to the enjoyment of the "seasons of refreshment" (3:20). Luke sees the realization of a people of God in Jerusalem as some sort of "restoration of the people" enjoying messianic blessings. He, however, does not see this as yet a "restoration of all things" which will involve the return of the Messiah as Son of Man¹⁶. Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration" (3:21).

"So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day" (4:3). Institutional authority is always concerned with deviant voices and divisive movements. Those with power in the church should guard against the facile collapse of private and public morality. The Sadducees, who exercise authoritarian leadership, are repressive and sometimes murderous¹⁷. Like Peter, the church, authority in India (the Bishop, a minister of the church, a servant of the church) needs to courageously

16. Johnson, *The Acts*, 73-74.

17. Wall, *The Acts*, 86.

speak out against malpractices like bribery, dishonesty, breaking of labour obligations, favouritism to one's own caste, swindling of money and so on. The violence against women is present all over India. The church must foster empowerment of women through the Christian community. Every woman in the country must be enabled to live without fear of violence or the scourge of poverty and to come forward to participate in governance. The Christians have to come forward and manifest the avoidance of these defects.

9. Prayer of the Community (Acts 4:23-31)

Peter and John go back to the community and tell them about the threats of the chief priests and elders (4:23). The whole community joins in prayer (4:24-30) like King Hezekiah when he was threatened by the Assyrian invasion (Isa 37:16-20).

The community of disciples remembers Ps 2:1-2, which has been fulfilled in the passion of Jesus, when people turned against the Lord and his holy servant Jesus whom he had anointed. Now the disciples/apostles are faced with a similar plot against them. They pray to be enabled to proclaim God's message "with all boldness", as Peter had done. They ask God to "stretch out your hand" to work signs and wonders (Ex 3:20). Such miracles will accredit the disciples as envoys of God (Ex 4:1-9) and attest the truth of the witness they bear to the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are praying that they may be given the same power that was offered to Peter.

The church in India has to pray for courage to speak against many factors that are fostered by some individuals in India against Christianity. The members of the church, the authority and the lay people, need to try to get the spirit of the prophet Jesus, and the spirit of the prophetic apostles and then live the spirit of the prophetic Christians in the India of today.

Conclusion

The first Christian community grew through struggles. But these struggles lead to the creation of an ideal Christian community in Jerusalem. This community has been an inspiration throughout the centuries for founders and foundresses of religious congregations of men and women in the world. The religious devote themselves to the founder's "teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The growth of the first Christian community and the religious communities is a real challenge to the church in India today.

Paul's Experience of the Risen Lord: Reflections on Mission, Persecution and Religio-Cultural Loyalty

Paddy M. Meagher

This is a study on the transformation of Saul (who became Paul) within the context of events and movements in India today, anti-conversion bills, aggressive activities against Christians, harassments and atrocities against them etc. Like Paul who remained an authentic Jew and the loyal follower of Jesus, the church is challenged to be authentically Indian as well as Christian. Dr. Paddy Meagher S.J., the author of this article is Professor of New Testament at Vidyajyoti, Delhi and is a frequent contributor to this issue of *Jeevadharma*.

Introduction

The narrative of Paul's experience of Jesus Christ - "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (9:5), is quite complex. As readers know our author narrates the incident with great detail in three interlocking scenes: A) Saul's vision on the Road; B) Ananias' vision at home; C) Ananias' meeting with Saul in the house (9:1-19). This event is retold in detail by Paul in two defence speeches, on the steps to the Roman barracks in Jerusalem addressing a riotous mob attempting to kill him (22: 3-21) and before King Agrippa, Bernice and Festus in Caesarea (26:2-23).

In his letters Paul makes no explicit reference to any of the details we find in the narratives of Acts though he mentions Damascus (Gal 1:17). The most explicit and detailed account of the change in his attitude to Jesus of Nazareth within the plan of God and his religious tradition we find in Galatians (1:13-17). The major elements in the text are his exemplary Jewish life, his vigorous persecution of the Church, the transforming revelatory experience of the Son, gifted to him by God

who had set him aside from birth, his subsequent presence in Jerusalem and his responsibility for the Gentile mission. In his letters Paul normally refers to this totally unexpected and inexplicable experience in polemical contexts when his status as an Apostle and the authenticity of his Gospel are being questioned.

In the study of the Acts we concentrate solely on the interpretations of this transformation in the person and life of Saul provided by our narrator. A significant question will be whether we are justified in describing this transformation as a radical change or as an unfolding of a long history of religious experience of a community which comes to significant expression in the life of a single member of the community.

We study the transformation of Saul who becomes Paul within the context of events and movements in India today. One major set of events for the Christian Churches has been the enactment of Anti-Conversion Bills. The initial Bill was passed in the former state of Madhya Pradesh. More recently Orissa, Tamilnadu and Gujarat have enacted bills which deal with inducements to conversion mainly aimed at the Christian Churches.

This legislation has been accompanied by more explicit propaganda and aggressive activities against Christians and attempts to reconvert to another religion, Hinduism, Adivasi Christians who were, prior to their becoming Christians, animists. Lurking in the background is the ideology that to become Christian is an anti-national act and the more serious ideological attitude that to be Christian is a betrayal of India's culture, history and heritage.

There have also been an increase in the harassment of and mild or serious atrocities committed against Christians or their centres of worship and institutions like schools and health centres. The series of incidents associated with the rape of a minor girl in Jabua are an example and the recent atrocities committed against Christians in a village of Orissa are another. Further signs of potential major harassment has been the attempt to deprive the Schedule Tribe members who become Christians of their status as members of the Schedule Tribes and the rights they have in the Constitution and legislation because of this status.

There are many Indians with various religious commitments who find in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, his teaching and death great inspiration and meaning for their own lives. There are a number who

year after year find in Jesus Christ the central mediator of their experience of God and become members of the various Christian Churches in the country. There are also many Christians who do suffer in all types of ways discrimination and mild forms of harassment and at times serious persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

1. The Event as Narrated in Acts

We shall look in a summary way at the details of the narrator's account of Saul's experience. We will focus our attention on motifs which occur in the narrative. In the first scene the narrative opens with a precise and vivid description of Saul the persecutor of "the disciples of the Lord" which provides the background for the following event. In the event two aspects are underlined, the phenomenon of light and the voice. The dialogue between the Lord and Saul follows with the emphasis on his role as persecutor and his being a persecutor of the Lord himself and that the Lord has plans for him. The brief description of the experience of his companions ends with an emphasis on Saul's blindness which necessitates his being led into the city where the blind man spends three days fasting.

The second scene narrates another experience of the Lord, presumably three days later. Ananias is given detailed instructions about the street and that house where Saul is at prayer and that in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him to cure his blindness. Ananias' reaction underlines the general fear of Saul and his reputation for persecution. The Lord had intimated to Saul that he would be informed of his future. Ananias is told of this future mission.

In the final scene Ananias meets Saul, reports to him the Lord's instructions that he should lay his hands on him to cure him of his blindness, adding also that he receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The scene concludes with a graphic description of the cure, Saul's baptism and breaking of his fast.

2. Transformation and Mission - Conversion?

Normally writers refer to the event in terms of the conversion of Saul/ Paul. There are very good reasons to describe the event in terms of mission rather than conversion. We shall substantiate this judgment. In the context of the great emphasis on persecution, in the initial vision the Lord's intention is expressed vaguely: "... get up and enter the city,

and you will be told what you are to do" (9:6). This is skillful narrative as the reader is left waiting. Yet the Lord reveals his hand when Ananias objects to the responsibility imposed on him, underlining with precision the grounds for real fear of this dangerous man. In reply the Lord said to him,

"Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15-16).

In the following scene an important feature is mentioned, the gift of the Holy Spirit which in Acts is so intimately linked to the mission of proclamation which has been the main purpose of the Lord's appearance. This is corroborated by the immediate descriptions of Saul's activities in Damascus and Jerusalem. Our narrator tells his readers:

... and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God". All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah (9:20-22).

A major motif of this part of the Saul narrative is again highlighted, the motif of persecutor though the main motif is proclamation.

3. Persecution of Paul and Attempts to Kill Him

At this point I wish to include another recurrent motif. Saul's vigorous proclamation aroused intense animosity among the Jews who we are told planned to kill him. This motif of Jewish animosity now towards Saul and their intention to murder him (9:23-25), is a motif which recurs immediately in Jerusalem (9:29-30) and will re-enter the story again and again. The final accounts of this motif are the attempt to kill Paul outside the Temple (21:30-35; 22:22-23) the plot to kill him in the Council (23:12-35) and later a plot to ambush and kill him on a proposed journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem (25:2). An earlier plot is mentioned during his journey from Asia to Jerusalem (20:3). Such Jewish animosity and attempts to injure or kill Paul have recurred throughout the story of his ministry. He recalls this ministry and this particular feature in his address to the Ephesian elders:

"You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews (20:18-19).

Another point needs to be added to this motif. As Paul journeyed back to Jerusalem the motif of suffering, danger and death is one of the themes, which dominates the narrative. Proclamation and suffering coupled with the danger of death is integral to the Lord's purpose for Saul/ Paul. This was already revealed to Ananias: I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (9:16).

4. Jerusalem Defense Speech

Speaking on the threshold of the barracks to the now silent crowd Paul recounts his original experience and its consequences. As the situation demanded, he underlined his outstanding Jewish prerogatives:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today (22:3) and his zeal for God and the Law was expressed in his activity as a persecutor:

I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me (22:4-5).

To his question 'What am I to do, Lord'? The Lord said, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do' (22:10). Again in this account Ananias is the spokesperson for the Lord:

'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name' (22:14-16).

The text combines both the transformation affected by the experience of the righteous one which combines sight and hearing and which is the basis for his task as witness, also by the rite of initiation into the "sect" and the finally the mission that the "God of our ancestors" has for Paul which is related to the role of Jesus in God's plan.

As the speech continues, Paul adds a further detail, unknown to readers up to this point of the narrative, namely Jewish rejection of which Paul was informed while he was at prayer in Jerusalem shortly after the Damascus event. Paul narrates also this experience of the Lord. We note in the text the motif of rejection and persecution, Saul is the preeminent persecutor who approved Stephen's murder and also the motif of the Gentile mission:

I fell into a trance and saw Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me'. And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him'. Then he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles' (22:17-21).

Of course, the final statement of his defense created an uproar and the Tribune rescued Paul from the further attempt by the Jewish crowd to murder him.

5. The Caesarean Defense Speech

We move on to the final defense speech before King Agrippa. Festus has to send Paul to Rome to appear before the Emperor following his appeal as a Roman Citizen. However, he does not know what charges to write and so asks King Agrippa to help him to frame charges. Therefore, Paul is allowed to make his defense before Agrippa who has expressed his eagerness to hear him. He begins by emphasizing his outstanding character as a religious Jew:

"All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? (26:4-8).

We note how consistently and persistently Paul insists on the quality of his Jewish heritage. The resurrection of Jesus, the risen Jesus who

appeared to him and whose messenger he became, is also rooted in the history of God's promises and intentions for his people. Readers of Acts would note that Paul had changed the focus of the accusations against him. In his appearance in Jerusalem before the high priest, Ananias, and the Sanhedrin arranged by the Tribune Claudius Lysias to find out the Jewish charges. Paul successfully had introduced his belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth to create a basic division in this body between the Sadducean groups and the Pharisees (22:30-23:10). However, the resurrection of Jesus was the crucial element in his experience through which he grasped Jesus' place in God's plan and was a core element of the Gospel he proclaimed.

As we would expect he goes on to develop in graphic details his intense hatred for Jesus of Nazareth and his followers:

"Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities (26:9-11).

Though Paul has elaborated the motif of his exemplary Jewish life and activity as a persecutor, yet he abbreviates the whole account of his experience, omitting all reference to Ananias. So in answer to his question "Who are you, Lord? Jesus responds directly to Paul and develops the fundamental purpose of his appearance:

'The Lord answered, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; *for I have appeared to you for this purpose*, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me' (26:15-18).

We note the emphasis on mission and its character which are linked to the experience of the risen Lord. Paul continues and outlines with great

conciseness to Agrippa his response over many years to the Lord's commission:

I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance (26:19-20).

He goes on to point out that this activity was the reason the Jews seized him in the temple and attempted to kill him. However, he re iterates the message he has proclaimed from the day he met the Lord. We note again how he roots the Christ events within God's plans evident in the great Jewish faith story and that he justifies his mission to Jews and Gentiles from within that same story, "what the prophets and Moses said". We quote the text:

To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (26:22-23).

Looking at all this evidence we can conclude that the event on the road to Damascus transformed Saul who recognized that Jesus crucified was the risen Lord and was at the centre of God's saving plan, articulated within his own religious tradition which in these events has come to its climax. He also ties into this experience the particular characteristic of his mission, namely the proclamation of the message to the Gentiles.

We have noted that this mission from its outset was accompanied by persecution and attempts on Saul's life. In his defense speeches which retell his experience in situations of conflict, Paul is at pains to underline his fidelity to his religious traditions, reinterpreted in the light of the experience and his fidelity to the God of his ancestors in his mission activities of evangelization. We conclude with a summary in Paul's own words to the Ephesian elders:

But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace (20:24)

Commitment to the ministry received from Jesus Christ and the consistent testimony to the good news of God's grace is the responsibility entrusted to the Church, Christian communities and individual Christians.

Contexts will differ and ways of ministry undertaken will depend on many diverse contexts yet the fundamental event must be proclaimed and remain present in human history. Persecution will also be expected.

6. The Accusations against Paul

We turn now to study the accusations against Paul. We shall look at the series of events which took place on Paul's arrival with Greek companions in Jerusalem from his meeting with James and the Jerusalem Church until his appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen when Festus proposed that he return under guard from Caesarea to Jerusalem and to appear before Festus himself in Jerusalem (21:17-25:12).

Readers are forewarned of the impending trouble which the narrator has made a thread of Paul's journey from Asia to Jerusalem (20:1-21:16. cf. 20:22-23; 21:4.11.14) in James' welcoming words to Paul:

"You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs (21:20-21).

The accusations are potent. There is an undercurrent of religious and cultural betrayal and dangerous disloyalty. James' fears become a reality in the upheaval in the Temple when Paul with a chosen group of Jews had nearly completed the days of purification and fulfilled his own vow. Jews from Asia seized him, threw him out of the temple and began beating him up with the accusations:

"Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place" (21:27-28).

The next important scene takes place in Caesarea before the Governor Felix when Ananais the High Priest who had earlier ordered an official to slap Paul on the face, some elders and an advocate Tertullus came from Jerusalem. After ingratiating the group with Felix, Tertullus placed these accusations which include sedition before him:

We have, in fact, found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the

sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and so we seized him (24:5-6).

There was another hearing before the next Governor, Festus but our narrator just summarizes the charges in a general way as the purpose of the scene is to create the background for Paul's appeal to the Emperor. The narrator tells the readers: "The Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem surrounded him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove" (25:7). However Paul's refutation of the charges gives their content: "Paul said in his defense, "I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor" (25:8). Some offences which touch on the authority of the emperor have been added to the religious charges we have seen above.

We get another glimpse of a charge which has not been mentioned by any of the Jewish opponents when Festus summarizes Paul's case to King Agrippa:

When the accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the crimes that I was expecting. Instead they had certain points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive (25:18-19).

Paul had introduced this point into the discussion at Jerusalem when brought down from the Roman barracks by the Tribune into the Sanhedrin as we saw above. This point will be the central issue in Paul's defense before Agrippa. He defends the core belief of the community and the basic element in his experience near Damascus, namely that the crucified Jesus has been raised and the implications of this event.

7. Paul's Defense

The Narrator's Narrative

Our narrator in various ways insists on Paul's responsible way of living according to the Jewish law. Paul ensured that Timothy was circumcised (16:3) and encouraged the observances of the decisions taken in Jerusalem (16:4). He prayed regularly on the Sabbath in synagogues (16:13; 17:2; 18:4.19; 19:8). There is a passing reference to a vow similar to the Nazarite vow (18:18) and in Jerusalem, following the advice of James, he performed obviously Jewish purificatory rites in the temple, bearing also the expenses of a group of four Jews (21:22-24.26). He planned his final journey to Jerusalem with the intention of

being in the city for the Jewish Pentecost feast (20:16). A respectful Paul acknowledged his grave mistake in speaking offensively to Ananias whom he did not realize was the High Priest: "I did not realize, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people" (23:5)¹. Through out Paul's ministry the Scriptures have been his source for the re-interpretation of Jewish hopes-and the proclamation of the place of Jesus in God's plan (13:16-41 - a model example, 17:3.11...). He remains very Jewish.

The writer defends the Jewish nature of Paul's life in other ways. James set out for Paul the plan of the purificatory rite to which Paul assented so that "all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law" (21:24). James implies that the Gentiles do not follow the full law yet observe some aspects which enables community existence (21:25).

8. Paul's Speeches

Paul is vigorous in his defense of his Jewish behaviour and beliefs. To the crowd he can claim with pride:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today (22:3).

Addressing the Sanhedrin he begins with the claim: "Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God" (23:1). He claims that the central message of the Gospel he preaches is profoundly Jewish: "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (23:6). This claim will be developed when he persuasively addresses Agrippa as we shall see. This is the only crime to which Paul agrees as he indicates to Felix (24:21).

Paul takes up other issues when he responds in a challenging manner to the accusations of Tertullus and others before Felix:

As you can find out, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. They did not find me disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd either in the synagogues or throughout the city. Neither can they prove to you the charge that

1. An alert reader will ask how Paul a Jew did not know who in the Sanhedrin group was the High Priest.

they now bring against me. But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, *I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets.* I have a hope in God - a hope that they themselves also accept - that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience toward God and all people. Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices (24:11-17).

We note Paul's insistence on his fidelity to Jewish religious tradition, his belief in all "laid down according to the law or written in the prophets". He underlines the great Jewish hope of resurrection he shares with others and his good conscience. Were we to continue the quotation we would see that he urges Felix to summon the Jews who stirred up trouble in the temple to appear and prove their accusations. He also states that the Sanhedrin members present ought to spell out his crimes. The only crime he accepts is the crime he confessed before them: 'It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today' (24:21).

The case before Felix came to nothing though he continued to meet Paul and was both fascinated and frightened by him. To all the accusations brought against Paul Felix finds no real case against him and procrastinates, hoping for a bribe and Jewish good will (24:24-27). Festus also found no grounds for the death sentence the Jews consistently demanded (25:25).

9. The Final Defence

Before Festus, who succeeded Felix as Governor, the writer has Paul take up the religious and political issues in a concise sentence: "I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor" (25:8). In his subsequent appeal to Caesar he states:

" I am appealing to the emperor's tribunal; this is where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you very well know. Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. I appeal to the emperor" (25:10-11).

Festus uses the opportunity of King Agrippa's visit to enlist his help to frame charges against Paul. Before Agrippa he takes up the same issues as in his earlier speeches. He states:

"All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial on account of *my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors*, a promise that *our twelve tribes* hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? (26:4-8).

He outlines his life as a great persecutor, his Damascus experience and his obedient response 'to the heavenly vision'. He then returns to the key to his life, his interpretation of Judaism and his evangelical endeavours, which have so, infuriated the Jews:

To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but *what the prophets and Moses said would take place*: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles (26:22-23).

The final goal of his preaching was "that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance" (26:20). This was in response to the Lord's original command to him which he formulated in these terms:

....for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (26:16-18).

We note that Paul's mission is a continuation of the original mission the risen Lord entrusted to the Twelve:

... and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance

and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Lk 24:46-47).

His defense is interrupted by Festus. Agrippa rises to leave after Paul has directly addressed him countering Festus' interruption:

But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth ... King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe" (26:25-27).

Before he leaves this dialogue ensues between the king and Paul:

Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am - except for these chains" (26:28-29).

The defence ends with the final declaration of total innocence:

... and as they were leaving, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment". Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor" (26:31-31).

What has emerged through out the defence speeches is Paul's loyalty to God of his ancestors, his religious traditions and one of the greatest hopes of his people. His Damascus experience enabled him to know that God had fulfilled this hope and promise in the resurrection of Jesus whom Paul experienced.

10. Rereading Paul's Experiences Today

We return to a short dialogue between our texts and situations in India. Paul's experience of God's self revelation in Jesus Christ, crucified and raised necessitates proclamation, the sharing of this message with Jew and Gentile. There is an imperative which he experienced whose origin is God himself, the God of his ancestors and of all people. Faced with the probability of death, addressing the elders of Ephesus he allows us to glimpse the core of his life:

But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace (Acts 20:24).

The church in all ages and cultures is under a similar imperative to witness to the good news of God's grace which she has received from

the Lord Jesus. Indian Church can not renounce this imperative this responsibility and gift. The resurrection of the crucified Christ is Gospel for all peoples. Context will determine how the message is proclaimed with fidelity.

However there are aspects of Paul's attitude to other religions - Judaism was not another religion - which we cannot accept today. The attitude was part of his religio-cultural background. An example is in the following text:

I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (26:17-18).

To be persecuted for disrespectful attitudes to other religions and practices is not surprising. Such attitudes to other religions cannot be justified with the insights we have today about the universal nature of God's saving love and revelation and also the role of other religions. However, Paul normally was not persecuted by Gentiles but by Jews.

The quirk of history was that the persecutor became the persecuted. Paul ought to have been able to sympathize with his opponents because he had been convinced that fidelity to his religious tradition demanded that he persecute the followers of the way. He realized that he had misunderstood that tradition. The Paul who had met Jesus as risen Lord continuously and justifiably defended himself by claiming that he did not pervert or betray his religio-cultural tradition and heritage. He remained a faithful Jew who had re-interpreted his tradition in the light of his experience of the God of his ancestors and the fulfilment of Scriptures in the event of Jesus Christ.

Where he can be of help to Christians today is in his continuous claim that he does not betray his religio-cultural tradition. He has interpreted aspects of his religious tradition in the light of religious experience yet he remained a Jew. Christians re-interpret their religious traditions and yet they remain Indian in loyalty and in culture. The communities of believers are challenged to avoid the western garb in which Christian tradition has clothed itself and continuously strive and search to inculcate themselves intelligibly and deeply within Indian traditions.

The account of Paul also helps the communities of believers throughout India to accept that forms of persecution are in some way inseparable from discipleship. Paul's own experience coupled with God's "promise" of persecution and his words to the Christians of Asia enable them to place their suffering for the Gospel within the plan of God. Paul said to a group of recent Christians:

After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God" (14:21-22).

Paul had remained a Jew in religious belief, in culture and in many of his ways of living. He insists upon this again and again. This insistence can be a challenge to Christian communities throughout India to reflect upon the depths of their respect for and loyalty to the complex and varied reality of Indian ethos and culture. This in a special way includes the diversity and richness of Indian religious heritage among people of various caste groups and traditions.

The communities may also wish that they would find fellow citizens with authority who would be as open and honest as King Agrippa and Festus and less opportunistic following in the footsteps of Felix. Yet they will continually meet "Jews" who will stir up mob violence and pursue policies of narrow bigotry and persecution. They belong to a rich heritage, illustrated in a major founding figure of the community, Saul of Tarsus, Paul an authentic Jew the loyal disciple of Jesus Christ.

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The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35) - An Indian Re-reading

Paul Kariamadam

This study on Jerusalem Council, the magna carta of gentile mission and freedom is more radical than Second Vatican Council in its decisions non-toleration of domination, caste system and separation of all kinds. When Christians tolerate such conditions Christianity is 'badnews'. Does it not challenge the Indian church today? Dr. Paul Kariamadam V. C., the author of this article, was Professor of New Testament at St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary Aluva and Superior General of the Vincentian Congregation.

The Jerusalem Council¹ is most important in the Acts of the Apostles and in the history of the Church. Preparation for it began already in Acts 10-11 with the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household. The first mission of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles continued that preparation. The Council may be considered as the watershed in the narrative of Acts.² Before this event Luke followed the movements of all the apostles. After this it is Paul alone who dominates the story. Before this Council the mission to the Jews was the first priority; after this, attention is given unequivocally to the establishment of Gentile communities. The meeting allows in a formal way the legitimacy of the mission to the Gentiles.

The Council occurred probably between the first and second missionary journeys of Paul about A.D. 48-49. It followed the temporary visit of Paul and Barnabas to the Church at Antioch of

1 The term council per se is not found in Acts 15. 'Sunedrion' an ecclesiastical assembly for deciding matters of doctrine or discipline is used here.

2 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina Vol. 5),

Syria. Gal.2: 1-10 is a general, non chronological Pauline version of the council, while Acts 15: 1-35 is a Lucan account of the event.

The Crucial Problem in the early Church

The preaching to the Gentiles and the influx of the Gentiles into the Church produced an acute problem, which had to be solved. The problem was the following. Before a Gentile became Christian and member of the Church, was it necessary that s/he should be circumcised and submit to the Law of Moses? Or, could a Gentile be received into the Church as such? Was s/he eligible for acceptance simply as a human? Is Christianity a national religion or a universal one? Is the gift of God only for a select few or for all the world? If we possess it, is it a privilege specially given to us, or is it a responsibility laid upon us to share it with others? Baptism versus circumcision is the issue behind. If circumcision went, the whole Law would go. It was, so to say, the cornerstone of the Jewish religion. It was its backbone. The question surely was not a new one. It had come up several times before, namely in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10-11)

There was also another problem connected. The strict Jew could not have relationship with a Gentile. He could not receive a Gentile as guest nor be his guest. He could not do business with him. How far can Jews and Gentiles associate in the ordinary social life of the Church and the world? Were Gentiles and Jews to be on the same footing with no difference at all? These were serious problems to be solved in the early Church. Though the solution was not easy, the Church through the famous council of Jerusalem took a decision. It declared that there should be no difference between Jews and Gentiles at all. The decisions of the council were the charter of freedom for the whole Gentile world. It solved the greatest crisis of the early Church. The universal world mission of the Gospel was made possible because of this council.

The occasion of the council

The Gospel was preached in Antioch and Jews and Gentiles were living together as brethren in peace. Now certain Jewish Christians (Judaisers) purported emissaries of the Jerusalem Apostles (Gal. 2:12) could not think of the Gentiles becoming Christians without circumcision. In other words, they should first become Jews before embracing Christianity. The Judaisers wanted Christianity become a sect of Judaism. The greatest missionaries to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas, opposed

this wrong position. Matters came to a deadlock and appeal was made to Jerusalem, to the headquarters of the Church. There Paul and Barnabas explained the mercy of God towards the Gentiles in saving them. However, again some believers of the Pharisaic party insisted that "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the Law of Moses" (15:5)³. The apostles and elders of the Church (the whole Church, see, 15:4,12,22) met together in assembly and debated the matter earnestly. Arguments against circumcision were strongly made by important leaders of the Church, namely, Peter, Paul and Barnabas and James the head of the Jerusalem Church.

The Arguments and Proposals

We find first of all the argument brought forward by Peter, the head of the apostles (15:7-11). His argument is (it is the third time Peter recounts the salvation of the Gentiles in the Acts) based on the fact that he has been the one chosen by God to preach to the Gentiles ahead of others. The argument is drawn from his experience with the Gentile Cornelius (10: 9-48). Cornelius indeed was a friend of God - this the Jews did not expect - and God never asked that he should be circumcised and made to keep the entire Mosaic Law. God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles through his ministry is clearly shown (10:8). Holy Spirit's action is to be specially noted in the conversion of the Gentiles. Peter makes explicit reference to the previous Cornelius story when the Spirit was received by the Gentiles (10:4-45). He equates the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles with that to the first believers (10:47; 11:15). Therefore the Gentiles are not inferior to the Jews. Peter clearly says that God does not make distinction between peoples. For him all are equal. The theme is based on the theological conviction concerning God's impartiality. Cf.10:34 and Romans 3:22; 10:12. The apostle points out that the Judaisers are challenging God himself, not humans. They do the work of testing (*peirazō*), which is an action of the devil in Lk.4:2. The seriousness of their action may thus be noted. The same verb (*peirazō*) is used in the testing of the Holy Spirit by Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:9). It is also employed to show the resistance to God in the OT. See for example, Exod. 17:2; Dt.6:16. The words of Peter concludes with the insistence that all will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus (15:11). The repeated emphasis on faith as the basis of salvation

3 Pharisē means the separated ones. These people had separated themselves from all men and tried to keep the last detail of the Law.

is found in Acts 10-15. This indeed is a concept seen in the epistles of Paul. Eg. Rom 3:24.

After Peter's argument the assembly listen to Paul and Barnabas. They do not argue at all (15:12). They simply narrate the many signs and wonders which God had worked through them among the Gentiles, especially in their missionary work among them (13-14). Life witness has greater value than many heated arguments and discussions. The expression 'signs and wonders' (*semeia kai terata*) show the working of God's prophetic Spirit (Acts 2:19,22,43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6,13; 14:3). It clearly indicates that the H. Spirit was the one who accomplished the conversion of the Gentiles. It may be noted that even today God works signs and wonders for the conversion of the pagans here in India and in the Gentile world.

Finally James, the brother of Jesus and an exemplary Jewish leader speaks. He was called the Just and was the moderator of the council, being the head of the Jerusalem Church. His arguments and proposals have special weight (15:13-21). First of all, James asserts that it is God who is at work in the conversion of the Gentiles; it is not a human doing. For God's intervention in human history Luke uses 'visitation of God' here (15:14) as well as in the third Gospel. He presents Jesus' ministry upon earth as a visitation of God (Lk.1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44)

It is to be noted in particular that God took out of the Gentiles a people for his name (15:14). The term 'people' (*laos*) is used for the people of God, Israel. Here it is shown that the Gentiles become the people of God. It is indeed a great privilege. They become Israel in terms of faith rather than in terms of ethnic allegiance⁴. In LXX the term 'Name' is synonymous with God. It is used in the Acts in reference to the Name of Jesus (2:38; 3:6,16; 4:7; 8:12 etc.). Zech 2:14-15(LXX) influenced Luke in this passage. The new people of God assemble in the Name of Jesus and invoke His Name and get power from this Name. Acts is called the Book of the Name and men are saved in the Name of Jesus. Great importance is given to the Name of God in India where all the major religions invoke the Name of God in prayer. There is similarity between the Jesus prayer used in the Oriental Churches and 1000 names of God (*Sahasra Nama*) prayed by the Hindus as well as the 101 names of God used by Muslims.

⁴ N. Dahl, *A people for his name* (Acts 15:14) NTS 4 (1957 – 1958) 319-27. has studied this passage in detail.

James strongly argues that the salvation of the Gentiles is according to the Scriptures (15:16-18). The words of the prophets he cites are from the Greek translation (LXX) of Amos 9:11-12. (These concepts are also found in Jer.12:15 and Is 45:21). Basing on this passage the restoration of Israel and then the conversion of the rest of human race to the Lord Jesus is clearly indicated. In other words, Scripture had predicted the events described in Acts 1-6 (Israel's restoration) and 11-15 (Gentile conversions). All are according to God's plan and nobody should stand against this. "We should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19). The Gentile believers need not subscribe to the Mosaic Law.

James, the moderator of the council finally proposes to write to the Gentiles a compromise solution. The problem of the social relationship between the Jews and Gentiles had to be solved. To make things easier in practical life the apostle suggested certain regulations the Gentiles must keep. Four regulations are proposed by him (15:20). These pertained to approved Christian deportment rather than requirements for salvation. These are the following.

1). A religious prohibition, namely abstinence from contamination of idols. Here the eating of meat known to have been sacrificed to idols is prohibited. One of the problems of the early Church was the problem of meat offered to idols. St.Paul deals with it in I Corinthians 8 and 9. Idols were considered as demons. By eating meat sacrificed to idols Christians would some way participate in demon worship, which is a gross sin. Recently satan worshipers are active in India too. The newspapers report about this at large. Every disciple of Christ (especially the young) has to take great precaution against this great danger.

2). A moral prohibition which consists in abstinence from sexual impurity (*porneia*). The unchastity mentioned here may have reference to ordinary sexual impurity for which pagans were criticized by Jews. The New Testament epistles frequently charge pagan converts to change their sexual ways. The main practices condemned were fornication, adultery, prostitution and homosexual practices which all undermined the family. See for example, I Cor 6:12,18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; I Thes 4:3; Hebr 13:4. Matthew considers impurity as a cause for divorce (5:32; 19:9). Ritual prostitution was connected with pagan cults during OT and early NT periods. Hence sexual immorality and idolatry are connected. I Cor 10:8; Rev 2:14,20. There is a flow of

bad sex through e-mail and other media flowing to India and the third world. The Church has to take a strong stand against this. Homosexual actions and marriages, which the Pope condemned strongly should not influence the Indian Church and people. Chastity was the only new virtue brought into the world by Christianity.⁵ New Testament morality was counter-cultural in the first century as it is to popular morality today. Christians are called to be pure in an impure world.

3). A hygenic prohibition. Gentile Christians here are prohibited to eat strangled or unbutchered meat. Many pagans considered a delicacy meat prepared in its own blood. The practice, however, was forbidden to Israel. There is life in blood was the principle behind this prohibition. Cf. Lev.17:10-14; Dt 12:16,23,25. The blood is to be offered to the Lord, before any creature is eaten. The sin attributed to the people in I Sam 14:32-34 is eating of blood.

The kosher regulations proposed by the council also have pertinence to India. For example, abstaining from pork and beef may be edifying in certain areas of India, where Christians live together with Muslims and high caste Hindus. Otherwise Christians would be considered as ‘polluted’ people. The words of Paul in I Cor 8:13 “if food is a cause of my brothers fall, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall” are pertinent here.

4). A civil prohibition. This consists in the abstinence from shedding of blood or violence which is related to the previous prohibition. Here cruelty, murder, manslaughter, inciting of riots and other similar activities common to the Gentile world are forbidden to Christians. “The Western Text” designates this prohibition as blood shed. We may remember that the Gentiles of the time could behave like wild beasts.

This prohibition also has great pertinence to India. Violence and blood shed, murder and kidnappings are increasing in this country day by day. The Church here should take the initiative to fight against violence, Naxalite killings, religious riots, abortion, killings of innocent and downtrodden people. Recently there is report on the so called honour killings (killings of the Dalits by the high caste people) which is horrible to hear⁶. It is a pity that religious groups, political parties and movements encourage violence and blood shed for religious and political motives

5 Cf. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ad loc.

6 Cf. *The New Leader*, February, 16-29, 2004. P.27

and gains. Religious fanatics, radicals and Mafias take advantage of the situation. M.K. Gandhi's non-violence and ahimsa are long forgotten. One should not forget that the Jerusalem council suggests ahimsa.

Finally we should note that the council took a compromise decision. Gentile Christians are to be exempt from circumcision; but for the sake of the Jews living among them they too must be prepared to make concessions and abstain from offensive practices. They were to observe the minimum moral and keep food laws of Judaism out of respect for the feelings of the Jews who might be associated with them. As it is clear, these requirements were socio-ethical directives for Christian conduct and not conditions for initial salvation.

The reference in 15:21 that Moses is read in every city, for generations implies that the basic requirements demanded from the pagans, who associate with the Jews in diaspora were nothing new. They were probably accepted by the Gentiles throughout the Roman empire. Hence they would not cause any obstacle to Gentile conversions. The requirements seem to be a restatement in the main of the Noachian precepts. The Rabbis taught that the sins mentioned here had been forbidden to Noah's sons, therefore to the righteous of all nations.⁷

A written letter to the Gentiles

After the proposals made by James the council decided to write an official letter to the Gentiles (Acts 15:23-29). Here James' proposals concerning the Gentiles are written as a decree (15:25). Again the Jerusalem Church reminds Paul of this decree in 21:25 during his visit to that community. An official letter to the Gentiles precluded the possible accusation of the Judaisers that the decree was forged by Paul. The decree was further supported by sending it through certain select, trusted leading men from Jerusalem Church (Judas called Barsabbas and Silas) (15:22). The council also commended highly Gentile Churches of whose freedom Paul and Barnabas were the champions. This avoided the possibility of belittling these missionaries by the Judaisers in the eyes of the Gentile Churches.

Worthy of observation is the fact that in the decree written by the council the main role of the Holy Spirit, in decision making is stressed: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to impose on you

7 See *The New Oxford annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, (Oxford University Press, 1991) ad loc.

any burden beyond those essentials: "You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols... Avoid these and you will do what is right". Holy Spirit indeed is a partner in the decision making of the council. Luke shows strongly that the main activities of the early Church are guided and directed by the Holy Spirit.⁸ In Acts 13:1-3 it is the Holy Spirit who is sending the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, to the Gentile World.

The Gentiles rejoiced when the letter was read out to them (15:31). Their joy, in fact, is the joy at the visitation of God and of the good news. They saw in the decrees read out to them the working of God and the Holy Spirit. And Judas and Silas, prophets from the Jerusalem Church strengthened and encouraged the Gentiles in Antioch (15:32). They returned to their community after helping the daughter Church in Antioch. Their action provides pastoral wisdom for modern man. Older Christian communities should render help, both spiritual and material, to younger ones. In India for example, the ancient Church in Kerala should help in various ways the younger communities in the North, especially the Dalit and tribal communities. Furthermore, by sending these men Judas and Silas – a personal touch is given to the pastoral ministry at Antioch. Mere sending of pastoral letters without pastors and leaders of the people directly meeting them, hearing their problems and sharing their sorrows and worries would not produce the desired results. The Jerusalem Church stands as an ideal model for the modern Church.

Special pertinence of the council to India

The Jerusalem council has great pertinence to India in general and the Indian Church in particular. A few points have been pointed out above in connection with the council proposals and decree. I would like to insist more on some of the urgent needs of the Church in India in connection with the study of this council.

1) The need for unity

The council took great efforts to unite the Gentiles and Jews in the light of faith and love in Jesus Christ. Paul in the council showed that Jesus the risen Lord broke down every barrier that humans had erected between them and their fellow beings. He understood that belief in Jesus should wipe out social, racial and economic differences and distinctions

8 The working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples in Acts is parallel to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus (in the Gospel of Luke). See

between humans. It is indeed a great wonder that Paul, a Pharisee with his Jewish background, saw this very important point and made Christianity Catholic (universal), through his mission and ministry.⁹ In baptism Christians receive the same Spirit of unity and it is, according to Paul, the basis of their unity. “For by one Spirit we are all baptized in one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13). Arguments for unity in the Church may not win the minds or emotions of the people unless sincerity of Christian witness, especially through suffering (like that of Paul and Barnabas), is shown. The council letter asserts that Paul and Barnabas “risked their lives for the sake of our Lord” (15:26).

Everyone acknowledges the fact that there exists divisions in the Church, Many know that it is a scandal too. It is indeed an open fact that the Church would be stronger and more effective if it were united. However, when actual steps towards union or reunion are suggested we are not sure about what we can change, let go or what we ,must keep. Selfishness and pride often reign indirectly in our dialogue and discussions for unity. Even today in the Churches we have a ‘circumcision party’ that wants to keep something which obstructs the way of renewal, growth and love among Christians. Sad to note in this context that certain emissaries from the headquarters of the Church and from abroad disturbed and disturb the union and peace here in the Church of India, as it happened in the Church of Antioch. This is because of the imposition of their liturgical traditions, customs and way of life here.

In India today there exist divisions between class and class, creed and creed, tribe and tribe, party and party, colour and colour, high caste and low caste etc. Low caste people are killed, tortured and murdered, just being low. Recent political and religious riots and murders are known to the readers and I do not enter into the details of the same. And in the Indian Church too sharp divisions between high caste and low caste,

about this, Paul Kariamadam, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke – Acts”, *The Living Word*, 86 (5), 1980, 299-315.

9 The term ‘universal’ originally means that which is turned towards the one (uni-versum), that which aims at forming something unitary. The Church is universal not only when it aims to reach ‘the ends of the earth’ but also when it tends towards its centre, the risen Christ. Cf. Raniero Cantalamessa. *The Mystery of Pentecost*, St.Pauls, Mumbai, 2003, p.15.

rich and poor, Dalits and non Dalits, Rite and Rite (and division in the same Rite also) may be seen. Low caste priests working for the high caste parishes are not usually tolerated. They are sometimes beaten and persecuted. It is a very consoling fact that Archbishop Telesphore Toppo (a tribal) is elevated as Cardinal and elected as the President of the CBCI. He is the first tribal Indian Cardinal and first tribal president of the CBCI. Tribals now feel as an important part of the Church here.

The division between Nordists and Suddists in the Syro-Malabar Church and that between the group of 500 (families), 600 (families) and 700 (families) etc. in the Latin Rite are also causing problems frequently. The so called Suddists claim to be 'Judeo-Christians', who have their origin in Palestine. They separate themselves from other Christians (Nordists) and practise endogamy, which is not healthy. Marrying people outside their caste and clan is prohibited by official ecclesiastical authorities even 2000 years after the council of Jerusalem. And surprisingly people of other (low) castes baptised and evangelized by them cannot join their diocese.

Certain Christian Churches here continue to fight among themselves for long years and their cases, to the shame of all, are taken to civil courts. This stands evidently against the advice of St.Paul not to take Christian problems to pagan courts (I Cor.6:1-2). No doubt, it is also a scandal and counter witness in a non Christian country.

True meaning of Christianity and true meaning of the love shown by Christ (which was all embracive) would be realised only when all middle walls of partition are broken down (cf. Eph. 2:14). Christians, especially their leaders, should try to break down the walls of separation mentioned above and become bridge-builders, uniting and bringing people of different ideologies and categories together. The word pontifex in fact means (in Latin) bridge-builder. All should be united as one body in Christ, because "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14)

2) The Necessity of Adaptation and Inculturation

The Jerusalem council is a paradigm for theological adaptation and inculturation. A serious reader of the Bible finds theological and cultural adaptation not only in Acts 15 but also in the whole Bible.¹⁰ Only by theological and cultural adaptation the Church in India can flourish here and find its proper identity. Even after 2000 years of Christianity here,

¹⁰ Concerning inculturation in the Bible, see Paul Kalluveettil, "Liturgical Inculturation- Biblical Insights", *Tanima*, XI, (2) 2003 pp.55-71.

the Indian Church has a foreign attire and is considered as foreign. This is because of the fact that theological, liturgical and cultural adaptation as well as a way of life suited to the Indian ethos is lacking here. For years much discussion and writing are done in this direction but nothing has been practically achieved in this area. This, may say, is because of the fact that emissaries ('circumcision party') from the headquarters object to serious attempts of theological adaptation and liturgical inculcation. The council of Jerusalem was very open towards the Gentiles and did not impose the Jewish Law (circumcision) on them. By receiving baptism the Gentiles could believe in Jesus and worship him in their own way in their culture and tradition.

It is to be noted that in the Bible circumcision itself underwent different stages of adaptation. Many of Israel's neighbours practised circumcision, notably the Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites and Arabs (Cf.Jer.9:25-26)¹¹. Having lost all memory of the origins of circumcision the Hebrews attributed different aspects of circumcision to divine injunction to Abraham (Gen. 17:19-27); to Joshua (Josh 5:2-7); and to Israel (Lev.12:1-5) We find in Gn 17:11 a significant theological reinterpretation of the rite. Here circumcision serves as a "sign" of God's covenant with Israel. It became the traditional ritual inclusion in the people of God. Slowly the prophets saw that physical circumcision does not have value unless one's heart is circumcised. It is a sign which relates to the commitment of the whole person to God in the covenant (Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ez. 44:7-9). This spiritual nature of circumcision made easy its replacement by Baptism in the New Testament. The Gentiles were admitted into the Church on the basis of faith and baptism (Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-18; 13:48). Baptism indeed is the true circumcision of the faithful (Col. 2:11-15). Circumcision is transcended and achieved in Christ (Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11).

The adaptation of pagan circumcision in the Bible is a pointer that we can adapt Indian (pagan) symbols, customs, traditions and feasts. Here adaptations should take place in art, literature, language and prayers. Diwali, Tiruonam, oil lamp, saffron dress, ārati kumkum and OM can very well be adapted to Christianity in India. The Roman Church was not afraid to transform the feast of the sun god as the feast of the birth of Christ, the light of the world.

11 The ancient people performed circumcision for different reasons. One important reason might be that of health. Cf. John L McKenzie, "Circumcision". In, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968.

Often we forget what is essential and what is not, what is the frame and what is the picture, what is the esse and what is the bene esse. In the liturgical matters after years of discussion, we have no proper view of the picture. We are discussing and fighting each other for the frame, a Chaldean, Roman or Anthiochean. An Indian frame of liturgy to worship God, who respects all cultures and way of thinking, is what is needed. In short, we have to dare to create a new Church and liturgy in India according to the culture and needs of the people.

Conclusion

The Jerusalem council stands as a model and guide for our councils, synods, assemblies and meetings. As in this council, we should have sincere, open and frank discussions in our councils and meetings. Hidden agendas should be avoided in our controversies and discussions. In the first council of the Church there were conservatives and liberals and those who stayed in the middle of the road. James, the moderator of the council, stood in the middle. His view - a middle compromise view won the day. Even today a compromise view is what is best for the Church. James had an open mind, though he was a conservative. He gave the new view and opinion of Paul a chance. With his support the council let Paul go ahead, though they were not decisively in favour of Paul, The Torah was not completely eliminated. The aspects of Torah that have always applied to the proselyte and sojourner continued to have their validity. Theological and cultural adaptation does not mean the destruction of the whole past. One has to build up the new on the solid foundation of the old. James keeps the old and blends it with the new.

The Church leaders have to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in the different new movements in the Church, such as the charismatic movement, basic Christianity, liberation theology, Dalit theology, Indian Ashram life etc, Finally, the division in the early Church was settled realising the initiative of the Holy Spirit in the Jerusalem council. Do we see the hand of the Holy Spirit in our councils, synods, meetings and assemblies and settle our problems accordingly? Usually we are reluctant to do so. The Holy Spirit indeed must be our strong partner in our decision makings as he was in the council of Jerusalem.

The Work of the Holy Spirit: The Universalistic Approach in Acts 6-12

Jose Vadakkedom

Universalism is a trait of the theological vision of Luke. In the Acts 6-12 one is progressively introduced to the conversion of gentiles and to the universalistic approach particularly in chs. 8 and 10. It is a turning point in the course of the history of Christianity. This is an invitation to the Indian church to redimension her life and mission. Dr Jose Vadakkedom who contributes this article is Professor of New Testament at St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam.

The work of the Spirit is unconditional and is not limited by any circumstances whatsoever. This unconditionality of divine bestowal of blessings was incomprehensible to the Jewish mind-set; all the more to the budding Christianity. The admission of the non-Jewish members to the church was challenged mainly on this background. The inspired authors of the New Testament successfully worked out this thesis and thus we have the church of today, liberated from the bondage of cult and culture and enjoying the freedom of the children of God.

Here we try to understand the mind of the Book of Acts regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, in its context of the gentile mission. The universalistic approach of the author of Acts is well established in this. We concentrate mainly on chapter 8 and 10 of Acts where we are introduced to the conversion of the ‘non-Jews’.

We limit our discussion to these chapters and especially in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. The matter under our discussion comes in a large section of chapters 6-12. A study of the structure of this larger text is done as a background. An analysis of the text (Chs. 8 and 10) is also made, though not exhaustively. We analyze the topic more in pastoral direction than academic and theoretical discussion.

Structure and Analysis of the Text

The whole section, (more precisely Acts 6:8-12, 24) can be seen as the second step in the evangelization process according to the program of Acts 1:8.¹ The evangelizing endeavour at Jerusalem are seen in the preceding section (Acts 1:1-6,7). The culmination of this witnessed a sad ending, in terrible persecution and scattering of the disciples. However, this in fact initiated the expansion of the Gospel. If there was no persecution, the church could have remained a faction of the Jewish religion! But God's salvific plan for the world was not that indeed. The persecution made people scatter all the world over and thus caused spread of the Gospel. The witness given by Luke to the fact that the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, even when all others were scattered could be intentional. The controlling/guiding leadership remains firm at the 'center' itself. Church is not a mere movement of some charismatic persons. It is a community with clear "head quarters" from its very beginning!

The passage under discussion comes in the larger section of 6:8-12,24. This section begins with the summary statement of 6,7 and ends with that of 12,24². The stories coming in between these summary statements show the starting and the development of the work of the Apostles among non-Jews.

The Stephen Event

The historian of Acts tries to locate the events in the context of the persecution of the disciples. The typical story of it is that of Stephen. An extensively long speech by Stephen (indeed by Luke) is inserted

- 1 Acts 18 reads as follows: "And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit come on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Interpreters take this sentence as programmatic statement expressing the expansion of the gospel from geographical point as well as theological point.
- 2 The summary statements are narrative devices used by Luke. Already in the Gospel, Luke had taken over from Mark the use of narrative summaries. In Acts, they are even more important, enabling him to provide a sense of fullness to a narrative otherwise low in specific factual content (See the *major summaries* like 2:42-27; 4:32-35' 5:12-16 and *short summaries* like 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20) See L.T. Johnson. *The Acts of the Apostles* (J Harrington S.J. ed. *Sacra Pagina Series*, Vol 5) Minnesota, 1992 Pp.9

here where we find the theological positions of the author.³ Stephen's death is followed by great persecution which caused the disciples to move to neighboring places (8:1-3). This indeed initiated the mission among the gentiles, as it stands in the Acts. Luke demonstrates in the speech that Israel has for a long time been going astray and the murder of Stephen proves afresh that Israel would not be converted, but would definitely be entrenched in its rejection of God. So the mission has to be extended to non-Jews as a natural follow up.⁴ The reason for the Gentile mission was clear in the mind of Luke; it is the will of God. However, this is fully developed only slowly by the author!.

The captain of the 'gentile mission' is introduced in 8:1-3 with a scanty, but substantial reference. Critical approach to the text suggests an intentional move by the author to project the narration of the conversion of the gentiles to the initiation of Peter, rather than Paul who became the champion of the movement later. It was Peter who became instrumental to the first evangelical endures (8:14-25) and later to the far regions. The story of Philip is brought in between, may be to shift the location from Jerusalem to Samaria.

Peter and the Samaritan Mission

Peter's mission is associated with the bestowing of the Holy Spirit (8:14-17) and preaching the Gospel in Samaritan villages is specially stated here (8:25). Though the Samaritans received baptism in the name of Lord Jesus, the new Christian initiation came to its culmination only by the reception of the Holy Spirit which was through the laying of hands by Peter and John (8:17-19). Though Philip has introduced the Samaritans to the faith, it is Peter and John who take up the Mission of converting them and bringing them into the church.

The conversion of the 'Outcast'

The episode of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian (8:26-40) shows a different stage of evangelization; the Ethiopian was ritually unworthy to be admitted into the people of God as an outsider in practice. The eunuch

3 We find many similar speeches in Acts. Whether the speaker in the text is Peter or Paul or any other, in fact it is Luke who teaches us his theology of Christian origins.

4 See E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Commentary*, Philadelphia, 1971, p.298

was not permitted to participate in the liturgical assembly. The position of this account is of great importance. It is situated between the conversion of the Samaritans and the Gentiles.⁵ The narration of the event concentrates on the fact of the divine intervention in the whole project. The angel carrying out the whole event tells the reader how it is God's initiative and not a human work.

The Christ encounter of Saul

The narration of the Christ encounter of Saul is not a mere addition to the topic. It is a key to the rest of the chapters, where we have the universal mission. The champion of the universal mission is already introduced in 8:1. Now the whole story of Saul, the man of the missions is explained. However, the author of Acts and naturally the early church are quite convinced that it is not Paul but Peter who is the leader of the Christian movement. At the same time the reader understands that it is neither Peter nor Paul, nor any other human person, but God himself who is the author of the missionary progress. It is God's plan and it is the Spirit of God who guides the missionaries, be it Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip, Ananias, Barnabas. Nobody can stand against the will of God.

The scene of the conversion of Paul could be understood fully only if we consider the other two narrations of chs. 22 and 26. Paul is elected and appointed as a servant and witness (Acts 26:16) This was "to open their (of the Gentiles) eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (God)" (Acts 26:18).⁶ It is no human initiative, but wholly a divine project.

Verse 31 of ch.9 is generally taken as a summary statement concluding the section. This can also function as an introduction to the following section. This speaks of the peace in the church (ironically may be because

5 At first sight the eunuch himself seems to be presented as a gentile. The conversion of a Jew (be he Jew by birth or by full acceptance of the Law) would be of no special consequence for the progress of the Mission. See Haenchen, 314-17.

6 Here we are reminded of the ancient prayer of the Indian Saul, namely 'Lead me from *Asat* to *Sat*, from darkness to light and from death to life. God's project through Paul is the answer to this prayer of humanity to be lead to light, truth and life.'

of the packing up of Saul, who came to the scene as a storm!); its being strengthened (may be by the addition of many other bold people like Saul and Stephen) and the encouragement given by the Holy Spirit. The church grew in number and they lived in the fear of the Lord. The 'God-fearing' were of special interest to Luke. These were such people who buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him (8:2) Their influence is seen even much earlier in the person of Nicodemus. The early church owe much to the God-fearing for its origin and progress.⁷

So the key sentence of the verse 31 can be seen as the apex or the central point of both the preceding section and the following section. The chapters 6-12 discuss the second step of the mission, the evangelization of all Judea and Samaria and the beginning of the mission unto the ends; of the earth, that is, the non-Jewish world. From chapter 13 we have the mission which extends to the end of the earth, carried out mainly by Paul and his companions.

The Cornelius Event

That Cornelius story is of great importance to Paul is understood simply by the fact that so much space the author allots to this in his book, namely, sixty six verses in all. Four factors in the account of Cornelius's conversion receive special emphasis and in turn provide insight into Luke's purpose for presenting this material. The first has to do with the early Church's resistance to the idea of Gentiles being either directly evangelized or accepted into the Christian fellowship apart from any relationship to Judaism (cf. 10:14.28; 11:2-3.8). The second is the demonstration that it was God himself who introduced the Gentiles into the Church and miraculously showed his approval (cf. 10:3.11-16.19-20. 22b.30-33.44-46; 11:5-10.13.15-17). The third is that it was not Paul but Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, who was instrumental in opening the door to the Gentiles (cf. 10, 23, 34-43, 47-48; 11,15-17). The fourth has to do with the Jerusalem church's subsequent acceptance of a Gentile's conversion to Jesus the Messiah, apart from any allegiance to Judaism which God obviously validated (cf. 11:18).⁸

7. Not only the direct members, but also the God-fearing persons associated with are of special position in the life of the church.
- 8 F.E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, Grand Rapids 1976, 383

Justification to Gentile Conversion

Chapter 11 further explains the new developments. Peter justifies his action of promoting the gentile mission. The reason of this new move was not any human reasoning, but God's activity (11:17), The conversion of the non-Jews is the work of the Spirit of God. In the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans was through the laying of the hands on them. In the case of Cornelius and family, the very hearing of the Word effected the same. The rite of Baptism, the conferring of the Spirit by laying of hands, the reception of the Gospel - all are instrumental to God's work and one can not put limit to divine action. Ch. 11:19-26 states how the grace of God appeared in other places and to other peoples. There were no official handing down of the Spirit; a supervision (Barnabas being sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem church) over the new community to help it in its needs for which personal goodness, Holy Spirit and faith were necessary (11:24). This was the ministry of encouragement (v.23). As a part of the ministry (of supporting), Barnabas brings Paul who could 'teach' the people better. Not only the ministry of encouraging and teaching is initiated at this point, but also that of relief service. Here too the initiative is from the disciples, however coordinated by the leaders, Barnabas and Saul. This relief work too was considered one of the main characteristic of the church's ministries, together with those of encouragement, teaching etc.,

Chapter 12 focuses its attention again on the persecution, the climax of which is the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, his escape from prison by God's hand and finally the death of Herod. Verse 24 stands as the conclusion of the whole section that started at 6:8 (or 7)

Does the Text speak of the Universalistic approach?

Has the Book of Acts, especially here in chs. 6-12, anything to say about the universalism of the gift of the Holy Spirit? Was the author of the Acts advocating the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the so-called 'Samaritan Pentecost' and 'Gentile Pentecost'? Does the early church defend the work of the Holy Spirit 'outside' the church? All the three questions are inter-related. Our answer to all these questions is 'No'. The intention of the author in writing this passage is not asserting the universalism of the gift of the Spirit. By universal outpouring of the Spirit or the universalistic outlook of the Spirit's work, we mean that

the Spirit is given to all, irrespective of the fact that they are formally initiated to the life of the church.

However, we do not deny the fact of universalism, which is very clear in the whole of Christian message. The new message of salvation, the Gospel is not limited to any place or person. It is given to all, to the whole world, to the whole universe. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of the Acts itself is seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the universal outpouring of the spirit (Acts 2:16-17). This new age is foretold by prophet Jeremiah too when he announced the establishment of the new covenant.

Universalistic approach of the Gospel

Jesus' explicit command to preach the Word to all nations excludes nobody. "He said to them: 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.' And whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mt 16: 15-16). Here it is important that Jesus had already spoken of a baptism which was his death (Lk 12:50).⁹ He invited his disciples to be baptized with him (Mk !0: 38-40). When he spoke this he already knew the baptism of water, given by John.¹⁰ The New Testament sometimes makes distinction between the baptism with water and the baptism in the Spirit (Mt 3:11-12) *Baptized here* (Mk 16:17) (the aorist passive form of the verb) could be understood as a divine action, rather than a ritual performed. The external ritual is not totally devalued. The tradition of the church (beginning from chapters 6-12 of Acts) advocated such rituals.¹¹ However, they are all secondary to the fact of believing and is always the work of God rather than human projects. Believing is necessary for not being condemned. The extra-ordinary signs (given by the spirit of God) will accompany those who believe (Mk 16:17-18). These are gifts following the fact of believing and all can have these provided they believe.

9 St Paul speaks of this when he discusses the Christian initiation. Baptism according to Paul is a dying with Christ and rising up with Christ (Rom 6: 45)

10 We are not sure whether Jesus and the disciples themselves gave baptism to those who joined them.

11 See how the Ethiopian Officer asks Philip for the baptism as he hears the interpretation of the Word of God he was reading. This is also the case with Peter asking to baptize the people who have already received the Gifts of the Spirit.

Acts 6-12 insists the fact that the work of conversion, be it of Samaritans, outcasts, zealous Jews (like Saul), gentiles, is always the work of God. God selects individuals to work out his plan. The persecutions too are divinely willed factors that would prepare ground for wide evangelization. The "main stream church" has the duty to oversee, encourage and teach the newly initiated faithful. That may also organize the charitable activities of the faithful. However, this is not a role of domineering of the new faith. God takes up to guide and protect the growth of the church. This is in accordance with the promise of being with them unto the end.

People receiving the Holy Spirit as they heard the words of Peter is not intended to show how the Spirit is given to all, even those not baptized. There was no question of whether they were baptized before hand in order that they receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism (of water) was administered not for the completion of their initiation, but rather for the assertion that they are already "baptized in the Spirit". The work of the Spirit stands independent of the ritual of the baptism of water. This is true also in the case of the Samaritan conversion (8:14-16). Here it is the baptism of water that takes place first while the conferring of the Spirit comes later.

The important element in both the cases is that it is through the mediation of Peter (in one case with the prayer and laying on of the hands and in the other, with the words spoken) that the Spirit is given. This mediation of Peter is however, the appeal of the main-line church as personified in Peter. In the case of Cornelius event, it is not just Peter's role is stressed. The whole event is guided by God directly, so to say that the gentile mission is the project of God.¹² The Jewish background is not necessary for such a working of God. The Samaritan conversion, the conversion of the ritually impure person, the zealous Pharisee's conversion, the non-Jew conversion - all are direct intervention of God and categorically approved by Peter and the team of leaders.

12 In the case of Paul, it is not Peter that represents the church, but Ananias, a senior member of the group.

Towards an Indian Reading of the Text of Acts 6:8-12,24

We have analysed the texts related to the so called Samaritan Pentecost and the Gentile Pentecost. Here we would like to make some comments regarding the text from the Indian missionary context.

Luke's description is both historical and theological. Biblical understanding of historiography attests only very little difference between these two. So we would like to read these lines as mere theological. Luke organizes his work according to the programmatic procedure. The gospel is now carried into the wider world; in the text, it is in the growing stage (of 2nd stage to 3rd stage), namely, from Judea- Samaria to the end of the earth. Luke prepares the persons related to this mission. Paul is the main figure in this scene. However, as in the rest of the stories, Peter is the leader, one who formally initiates the work. Others (people like Philip, Stephen) might prepare the ground. The persecutions create the context of this expansion of the Church. The Stephen story is to be read in this context. The divine initiative and protection and continued guidance are the background force to all missionary activities. This new development is fully in agreement with the promises of Jesus and the post-Easter blessing.

The Indian reading of the text would give us some beautiful insights. Here we would like to list some of them also as a conclusion to our discussion.

1. We are invited to understand the missionary work as God's initiative. Human beings and structures are only instruments.
2. The support and encouragement needed for the newly converted believers should be duly given time. The main-line church has the right and the duty to this service.
3. Preaching and hearing the Word are the source of the bestowing of the Holy Spirit. Once we notice that the people are given the Spirit, baptism is the natural course. Here we have to think in our missionary context some rite of baptism may be administered in private, if necessary, and then finally at some convenient and proper occasion the official acceptance to the church by the laying of hands and prayer!
4. The work of the Spirit has no limit. The wind blows where it wills. Cults and culture are no barrier to the work of the Spirit. What is more vital is the proclamation of the Word to all creatures.

5. Proper discernment is necessary as in the case of Simon the Magician (Acts 7:4-25) story. The fact that one has believed alone does not guarantee the right approach to the work of the Spirit. People could be still under the spell of their old life. So the persons entrusted to look over the faithful are to keep watch on the faith of the new comers lest they go astray.
6. Persecution is not something to be avoided by way of some compromise. Persecution is an opening to the proclamation of the Word outside our 'safe' regions. The Lord will protect and make flourish his mission.

Conclusion

The Gentile Pentecost and the new missionary movement caused changes in the attitude of the traditional line of faith. The new comers to faith were not to be strictly brought in line with the traditions of old. There were many heated sessions over this in the early church, as we read the reports of the Acts. It finally ended up in the Council of Jerusalem, which formally regulated the new wave of mission. This was not a going back or a concession granted, but the growth of the advance of salvation.

The whole history of Christianity changed its course from that time on. This opened the way for a Chinese Church, an African Church or an Indian Church - however, this is to be fully achieved. We are called upon to meditate over, and to work hard on this very important, though apparently passing, statement of Acts, "And it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians".

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